

黙示錄アリス

Apocalypse Alice

The illness of a girl ending the world.

No. 2

鏡貴也

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●かがみたかや

メ切りが忙しくなるほど部屋の掃除を頑張り始めてしまうという作家たちをよく知っていますが、僕は、かねてから念願だった五本のギターを壁にかけるという一大作業に熱中……え？ メ切りはどうしたって？ こ、これやらないとインスピレー……はい、やります。



黙示録
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僕らは、少女を殺して世界を救う

水色群青
Mizukō Gunkō

氣流キリ
Kiryū Kiri

有栖真之介
Asagi Minao

遠藤洋介
Endō Yūsuke

火城白
Hikisama Shiro

夕闇陽見
Yūgama Hōmi



「真之介君は私と同じ世界の住人なのに……
あんなにも強いのに……まだ、優しさを失っていない」

「僕は優しくないよ」

「だけどその優しさは、今回はあなたを殺すと思う」

Prologue 1 - About Hell and Purgatory

I don't need friends.

I don't need cozy relationships.

But yet, in a confined room.

"Love you, love you, I love you ~ ♪"

My classmate, Kiryuu Kiri, sang a popular song passionately.

What a pretense she was putting on.

The skirt of her sailor uniform fluttered, and danced.

Before me, Endou Yousuke chose his song earnestly, and Yuuyami Himi happily clapped her hands to the beat.

We were in a karaoke box.

I always thought of karaoke boxes as peaceful places, as where untroubled idiots sang their idiotic songs in an idiotic manner; but at that moment, I was there, forcibly brought there against my will ——

"Hey! Shinnosuke-kun, are you hyped?"

With a mic in one hand, Kiri winked at me.

Himi and Yousuke shouted

"Yay!!!"

I had absolutely no idea what that 'yay' was about. To begin with, have I ever in my life uttered that idiotic exclamation, 'yay'? No, never. Absolutely never. In the first place, I have no idea what kind of enthusiasm a person must have to make that utterance.

I averted my half-opened eyes in exasperation.

Upon doing that, immediately to my right; a guy in the same grade as me —— Hishiro Shiro, who had been eating from a pile of potato chips —— grinned and said,

"Hey Shinnosuke. You should try to have more fun."

"It's because I'm not having fun."

"Even though you say that, you're actually enjoying....."

"I'm not enjoying myself. Rather, it's horrible."

"Don't be shy. Since your personality is so horrible and you seem to have no friends at all, you might not know this, but....."



"I still don't have any friends."

"You have us, right?"

"Your joke isn't funny."

"It was us, your good friends, who were the first to come rushing to save you when you were in a bind earlier....."

"Huh... what, you're trying to make me feel indebted to you guys..... don't you feel embarrassed saying that?"

"No, the one who's embarrassed is you, right? In a karaoke box, the one who's trying to embarrass others is, on the contrary, the one who's embarrassed."

"Shiro, it's okay to feel embarrassed."

"Embarrassing ~"

"....."

"Embarrassing ~"

This time, Yousuke who was right before me said it in unison with Shiro. The two of them were enjoying themselves like little children, and as I gave them a hard look..... "I'll kill them," I thought to myself. "I'll kill them the next time we enter a labyrinth."

But it was impossible right then, so with a look of disgust,

"Jeez..... isn't this bullying?"

As I said that, the big-breasted, beautiful, high school idol-like girl who had been singing and dancing, Kiryuu Kiri, reached the hook of her song and as it entered the break, she beckoned to me and said,

"C'mon Shinnosuke-kun! Let's sing together!"

"Absolutely no way."

I expressed my resolution.

However, the cruel enemy who knew no mercy continued his attack.

Shiro said,

"All right, it's your turn next. As your good friend, I've already entered a song that you should be able to sing."

"Huuu!?"

With a jerk, he passed me the mic. I tried to push the mic back, but with my right leg injured during the last labyrinth raid I couldn't use any real strength. The mic was pressed on me.

"T-This is a joke right!? Hey Gunjou, you should also say something to these fools."

Seeking help, I turned my eyes to the only girl in this karaoke box who should feel embarrassed at singing.

Next to me on my left, Mizuiro Gunjou.

She should feel the same way I do.

Reason being: She is an elite magician who's successfully raided several Eternal Labyrinths and already has more than 20 corporate sponsors.

And in this world, one who wants to obtain such strength shouldn't have even a second to spare for cozy relationships.

Because in this broken, insane world that cannot be saved at all, obtaining overwhelming strength requires you to pay an unbelievably large price and make huge sacrifices.

"....."

That's why Gunjou should feel the same kind of exasperation as me. My comrade in exasperation. Of course I don't believe in things like comrades or friends, but at that moment I looked to Gunjou for help as a fellow exasperated comrade.

I looked at her, thinking: You should also say something.

However, her strong-willed, almond-shaped eyes, were looking intently in the direction of the dancing Kiri with envy and a temptation.

"What, you want to sing as well!?"

"Ehh?"

Gunjou looked at me in surprise. It's easy to see that her cheeks were flushed.

"There's no way that would happen, right!? Erhm... I didn't intend to hang out with these brats, just so you know! Erhm... but if you really want me to sing that badly, then I have no choice but to sing..... but-but, if you don't tell me that you really want me to sing that badly, then I definitely won't sing. Get it!?"

Upon hearing that, wearing a gentle smile, Himi handed over the song selection remote and said,

"Erhm, Gunjou-san, I really-really want to hear your singing voice very badly."

Gunjou immediately took the remote.

"..... I don't have a choice, huh~..... It's because you really want to hear me that badly that I'm going to choose a song, get it? I really don't want to sing, just so you know!"

"....."

What the f**k was wrong with her?

I didn't feel the need to listen to her words any longer. Damn traitor. Trash. My foe. I knew it, "comrades" are an illusion. There's no meaning to cozy relationships. Even if it was for an instant, I was a fool for believing there was someone who was like me.

Kiri's song ended.

"Aah, feels good! Oh! Shinnosuke-kun is holding a mic!? Shinnosuke-kun, are you singing next? What are you going to sing!?"

"Eh? N-No, this isn't....."

Speaking over my protests, Shiro said,

"All right, I've been waiting for this!"

"I'll kill....."

But,

""Yaay!""

Cried both Yousuke and Himi.

As I thought, what kind of emotion does one feel when one says 'yay'?

Claps resounded.

Gunjou looked at me happily, with eyes that seemed to be expecting something.

The music started.

It was **Enka**. Indeed, it was a famous song often heard at the end of the year, and one that even I could sing.

"Erhm..... Just for the record, I'm not going to sing, you know?"

But, everyone remained silent and looked at me with eyes filled with anticipation.

"I'm not joking..... I really won't sing, you know?"

Everyone just grinned and looked at me. They were looking at me with faces that said, If you really don't sing, you'll look really lame.

"....."

For some reason, my heart started pumping furiously. My entire body filled with a nervousness that was even worse than what I feel each time just before entering a labyrinth, a place where I can die in an instant if I make a mistake in judgment.

On the TV screen where the lyrics display, appeared the amount of time left before the intro ends —— 6 seconds.

Only 6 seconds left.

If this were a labyrinth, it would no longer be possible to clear it. There would be too little time left. There would be a need to activate Escape magic and bail.

However, there is no escape. With my leg injured, I couldn't get out of this karaoke box.

This must be a joke, right? Does this mean that I really have to sing?

My body stiffened.

How did things turn out like this? Why do I have to go through this? Even though this is not a labyrinth, it feels like hell.

I gripped the mic in my right hand tightly. I could feel my palm covered in sweat.

3 seconds remaining.

It started.

The song started.

Driven to the wall,

"Aaah, jeez, damn! I just have to sing, right!? Only one song!"

"Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaayyyy!"

Except for Gunjou, the rest gave a chorus of 'yay's with unbelievable delight.

Amid the peak in tension, I had no choice, really no choice but to sing the Enka —

"Here's your Oolong tea."

A female server entered. The server glanced at me, smiled and nodded with a grin, making a face that must be undoubtedly thinking, "You seem to be enjoying yourself. That's great, really great."

"Ah....."

I thought.

"Aaah!?"

I thought.

But, I couldn't stop singing at that point. While it's embarrassing and disconcerting, if I were to stop, I think my embarrassment would become even more obvious.

So I continued to sing.

Even as the Oolong tea is handed to me, I couldn't stop singing.

If I sing, it's like hell.

If I don't sing, it's like purgatory.

The server left.

I sang the Enka sadly.

Maybe because they've noticed that, Shiro and Yousuke seemed to stifle their laughs.

"Cute", I could hear Kiri say softly.

I'll definitely kill them later.

No doubt about it.

Or... Can someone please kill me now?

"....."

Putting that aside, this is a story about songs.

A story about using {{Template:Arisu:HPF}}s^[1], filling our neural matter with cursed songs, risking our lives in desperation, hollering magic.

And then killing girls.

Killing girls who contract an illness.

And about this world where we kill girls ——

"Shinnosuke, your Enka singing is really good. Why don't you enter another song? How about **Tsugaru Kaikyou**.....

"Hey, stop fooling around!"

"Eh? You prefer J-Pop?"

"No!"

"How should I put this to you, when the server came in, you were pretty high....."

"Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

I shouted through my Enka.

Chapter 1 - The Heart to Trust Comrades and Despair

A nightmare.

A nightmare that I often have.

A nightmare in which I couldn't save my little sister, who was afflicted by the Labyrinth Disease.

Maybe it's impossible for me.

It's a dream in which I have that fear.

A dream in which, my little sister Saki smiled, and in the instant I thought that I would soon be able to save her.

She disappeared.

I wailed

Lamenting my weakness.

But,

"....."

The nightmare I had that day was different. In the first place, it was a nightmare that nothing to do with the Labyrinth Disease.

It was a dream about karaoke.

A dream about what happened the other day, when I was forced to sing at the karaoke booth despite my protests.

The worst dream I could have.

And then,

"Ugh."

My face grimaces, and my body quivers from the feeling of being pulled back from the nightmare suddenly.

My face grimaces. My eyes open wide.

I awake from my nightmare.

I am in the labyrinth. In the dungeon of an alternate dimension, born out of a girl with the Labyrinth Disease.

The girl is right before me.

The diseased girl.

In the world covered with flower beds.

Red, blue, yellow, various colors.

A girl stands in the center.

The girl is being manipulated by a gigantic hand that has black skin like that of a devil.

Held in the right hand of the girl, is a chainsaw, and with a throaty whine, it is raised up with a powerful swing.

I then realize.

Just now, after getting kicked on the head by her, for a few seconds,

"Kuh, I see..... I was out cold!?"

The chainsaw grinds.

I try to dodge, but my body won't make it. The teeth of the rotating chainsaw cut the flowers apart.

The petals dance.

And, just as my head is going to go together with them,

"Hey, what're you doing!? Don't space out Shinnosuke!"

A girl kicks me from behind.

It's Mizuiro Gunjou. With golden hair and strong-willed eyes. Her petite body quickly stands before me.

I can only feel myself get sent flying from her kick.

"Argh."

I cry out like a blockhead. Thanks to that, my head didn't get decapitated. I roll around on the flower bed. Choking smell of the flowers. As the scenery swirl around me, I can see Gunjou using her magic.

The 《Headphone Fuzz》 plugged into her cute left ear is playing a cursed song that's not really cute at all. A curse fills her brain to the brim.

And then,

"..... Sea Moon Wheel switch!"

Gunjou uses her magic.

Instantly, multiple transparent, jellyfish-like balls filled with water appear around her, and they start rotating with a buzz.

The grinding chainsaw and the buzzing jellyfish collide. Collide. Then, the chainsaw gets severed.

Overwhelming. Gunjou is far stronger than the diseased girl.

Gunjou grabs the neck of the diseased girl.

"Checkmate! This time too, I've used my strength to save the world!"

The diseased girl makes a fearful looking face.

I look hard at that, and narrow my eyes.

But, Gunjou has no mercy for her. If she doesn't kill her, she'd be killed. This is such a world. More importantly, if the girl isn't killed, the hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of humans who would get swallowed by the labyrinth brought forth by the girl would disappear.

That's why there is no need to get meaninglessly emotional about it. If one relaxes for even an instant, not just one's own life, but the lives of many people would be robbed away from them.

So.

"....."

So ---

"It it me..... who is the savior!"

Gunjou hollers as if she were saying that to encourage herself. And then, she breaks the neck of the girl. The girl dies. Easily.

Instantly, the scenery changes.

The flower beds disappear.

The place is the maneuvers venue.

Inside the gymnasium prepared and operated by Kichijouji High for the purpose of exterminating diseased girls.



The girl we just fought was a fake.

An illusion.

A simulation.

It was a virtual dungeon generated by the school's practice machine and sent to our brains using the 『Headphone Fuzz』 attached to our ears as an intermediary.

My class, year 1 class 5, were having an exercise in labyrinth raiding inside that dungeon.

Our homeroom teacher, Honjou Tsukasa, says.

"Okay, Arisu Shinnosuke was a little unsightly at the end but..... for today's exercise, our class is again the fastest one to clear the labyrinth. You guys are pretty good."

Looking around me, there are twenty students of class 5 in the maneuvers venue.

In the virtual dungeon, only Gunjou and I had broken through into the room where the diseased girl was, and there was apparently nobody else around me, but that was just an illusion, and everyone had been moving helter-skelter nearby, it seems.

Lying on the ground, I look around absent-mindedly.

Gunjou, who is beside me, immediately looks down at me with cold eyes and says.

"..... you're being laid back again, what on earth are you planning?"

"About?"

"Your true power is not at that level right? In the first place, the power that you showed me in the labyrinth born out of that 『Asahi Momoka』"

"Is at this level right? That's why I almost died."

"You exterminated the girl."

"Huh, that's strange. That should have been you right?"

Gunjou glares at me. And says.

"..... if you weren't there..... I would have died, and the world would have ended as well. You were the only who did everything, but yet, but yet why're you letting me take the credit....."

At that moment, our homeroom teacher, Honjou Tsukasa says to us.

"What're you guys arguing about?"

I answer.

"She's mad at me for losing consciousness and lazing around towards the end."

"No way."

Uttered Gunjou in a surprised voice.

Honjou Tsukasa-sensei nods in agreement.

"That's true, Shinnosuke. The simulation this time is just a rank 3 labyrinth you know? So what's up with that predicament you were in?"

"I'm a little sleep-deprived."

"For crying out loud..... compared to him, Mizuiro Gunjou, you were wonderful today as well. As expected of an elite from the Mizuiro house."

If it were the usual Gunjou, she would be puffing out her chest, full of confidence, but now, with a face that seems to be unable to agree with that, she looks down at me one more time and leaves the place.

"And also, Hishiro Shiro, Yuuyami Himi, Endou Yousuke, and Kiryuu Kiri, the four of you had good movements as well. Just what I would expect of those, together with Gunjou and Shinnosuke, the 『Hero Team』, who had stayed until the end and cleared the labyrinth in that 《Asahi Momoka incident》.

『Hero Team』.

Right now, it's name of the team made up of the six of us.

We probably have become famous, as the team of heroes who stayed all the way till the end and cleared the unexpectedly high level labyrinth born out of the diseased girl called Asahi Momoka, which might have caused the deaths of 3 million people in Kanagawa if things had gone bad.

I look hard at the small back of the departing Gunjou,
"..... even though we're killing heroes, we're being railed as heroes huh."
I murmur dully.

The rest of the students start moving as well.

The next period is a classroom lesson, and it's far away from the gymnasium. If we don't get moving right away, we won't be on time.

But still, I did not move.

Hishiro Shiro, who has been watching me, approaches me.

Bearing gray hair, and a pair of strange, piercing, red eyes.

Behind him, Shiro's friends --- Yuuyami Himi and Endou Yousuke, are following him like his shadow as usual.

Shiro says.

"She got mad at you. You went easy again?"

He extends his hand to me.

Ignoring his hand, I reply while getting up.

"In the first place, do we need to take these lessons seriously?"

"You get money from the school if you get good grades."

"Money-monger."

"Are you really saying that?"

Shiro smiles.

I start walking with a foolish grin on my face.

The money is indeed appealing. Since one needs lots of money to use magic.

The more powerful the magic.

The better performing 《Headphone Fuzz》 it requires, and money is never sufficient no matter how much one has. That's why I'm a

money-monger. In order to save my little sister, I need a limitless amount of money.

I need power.

I need money and power.

But.

"....."

Shiro looks hard at me and says.

"You rather let go of the money than let the school know your true power. The truth is, you were the one who killed Asahi Momo right?"

"It was Gunjou."

"It's impossible for Gunjou."

"Ohh, I wonder? You seem to know Gunjou well. Don't tell me the two of you are acting as if you hated each other in public, but are actually lovers?"

Without getting provoked, Shiro says.

"You are much stronger than Gunjou. In those final moments, there was nothing Gunjou could have done. Thus, the one who disposed of Asahi Momoka had to be you."

I return.

"For a person who Escaped and got out quickly, don't say it as if you had witnessed it yourself. I wasn't of any help. Gunjou did her best. That's the truth."

At the very least, the part about being not of any help is the truth. As a person who is trying to save my little sister, I'm killing other diseased girls. With such dirtied hands, I wonder what kind of face should I make when I meet my little sister?

Shiro looks at me intently and says.

"If you really want to insist on that, it's fine."

"Then don't talk to me anymore."

"That wouldn't do. At any rate, we're....."

"We're not friends."

"We went to karaoke together right?"

"That was you bullying me."

"But you looked like you have fun, didn't you?"

"Really? That was just a misunderstanding on your part, wasn't it?"

I turn around and start walking. Shiro says to my back.

"Hey Shinnosuke."

"....."

"Your enemy and my enemy might be the same one, you know?"

My feet stop. I turn around. I look at Shiro with half-opened eyes.

Hishiro Shiro.

A capable person whose ability is on par with the super elite Mizuiro Gunjou.

With strange, red, clouded eyes which I surmise must have been the result of some kind of experimentation he underwent. He has a 《Headphone Fuzz》 that is configured to use 6 specialized offensive magic, clearly an inefficient configuration.

His movements in the labyrinth were wonderful. Rational and accurate. Even though it's of a different nature from Gunjou, he too possessed charisma. If he's serious in persuading other classmates to come under his wing aside from Himi and Yousuke, they would probably follow.

But, he remains isolated.

Shiro, Yousuke, and Himi; the three of them are always acting together. Even though they said that they wanted to defeat Gunjou and become the heroes to clear the labyrinth, they would never increase their comrades.

But yet, to a ill-natured person who's isolated by the rest of the class, he's even willing to go to the extent of paying me to invite me to his team.

What on earth is the meaning of this?

I look hard at Shiro --- no, I look hard at Shiro, Himi and Yousuke and say.

"..... what do you mean by enemy?"

Shiro looks intently at me.

"You tell me."

"I have no such thing as enemies."

"Ohh..... then who did I save you from? The ones who attacked you the other day were the special magician forces of Taikou Pharmaceuticals right?"

Taikou Pharmaceuticals is a gigantic research corporation that our school has several contracts with in order for us to be able to raid labyrinths.

When a diseased girl appears, Taikou Pharmaceuticals will send its researchers to commence the investigation of the labyrinth brought forth by the girl.

And my cousin, Sanae Yayoi, is a researcher who works there.

I cock my head to the side, and smile.

"Then, Shiro's enemy is really Taikou Pharmaceuticals?"

It was an enemy I deduced previously. With the skill level of Shiro, he could easily earn money as a magician anywhere. There are plenty of safe employers to work with.

So why did he choose to come to this school?

In this school, he could die instantly from just a single mistake, so why would he come here to take classes to kill diseased girls?

In the first place, there are only three types of people who would come to this school.

* Those who need power no matter what.

* Those who need money no matter what.

* Those who want to save the world no matter what.

But Shiro is probably different. With abilities like his, money making would be an easy thing for him. He must have some other goal he needs to accomplish. He must have a secret.

Of course, anyone would have one or two secrets.

I say.

"..... well then, those red eyes are really a product of experimentation by Taikou Pharmaceuticals? So, are you going to take revenge?"

It was a very common story.

More like, such hatred should be dispersed on a daily basis around Taikou Pharmaceuticals.

Considering that, if what my cousin Yayoi said about the unexpectedly high level labyrinth which appeared a while back --- the 《Asahi Momoka incident》 was true, then, it was all caused by the human experimentation done by Taikou Pharmaceuticals, it seemed.

The labyrinth disease onset in Asahi Momoka was forcibly caused by Taikou Pharmaceuticals.

And do the staff of this school know that?

Does the government of this country know that?

Or was it an independent action of Taikou Pharmaceuticals?

How much power does Taikou Pharmaceuticals hold in this country right now?

I don't know all that.

At the very least, the official news about Taikou Pharmaceuticals being involved in the Asahi Momoka incident --- never did come out.

"Is your enemy Taikou Pharmaceuticals?"

I said, and Shiro smiles.

"I never said that."

"It'll be the same if you said it anyway."

"Maybe I'm testing you?"

That possibility exists of course. The truth is, even after saying that, there's also the possibility that he himself is from Taikou Pharmaceuticals ---

"I don't want to play such deception games with you. Since I have no interest in you."

Once again, I start walking.

Shiro then says to me.

"Hey Shinnosuke, wait."

"Don't wanna."

"What's your purpose? With skills like yours, what're you doing here in this school?"

It seems like he has been thinking about the same thing as me. Indeed, it's a strange thing for me to be in this school. A magician like me has plenty of ways to make money or acquire power.

There is only one reason why I am here.

That is to raid the labyrinth possessed by Kichijouji High, the world's most difficult labyrinth --- also known as 『Apocalypse Alice』, to save my little sister Saki.

However, I have no obligation to explain it to them. Nor any need to. I don't need any comrades to fight alongside me. I hate cozy relationships. What do cozy relationships become? I'm already tired of having my trust betrayed.

I answer the words of Shiro.

As to why I am in this school.

"Well, I have a rather good personality since I was born, and I can't help but want to save the world."

I intended that to be a joke. I intended that to be a foolish joke.

But Shiro says,

"I believe you."

"Ah?"

I scowl as I turn around.

Shiro continues.

"I already knew that you are a good guy from your actions in the labyrinth. You were the one who saved my life."

"..... what're you talking about?"

"Yousuke too, Himi as well. No, you saved the lives of 3 million people in Kanagawa."

"So what? This is getting gross."

Shiro points at me and says.

"But still, even so, at that last moment when we were attacked by Asahi Momoka --- Escape should be the only option to take. If you have any goal or mission to accomplish by coming to this school, then you shouldn't have been able to remain in that labyrinth. If you had lost your life, that would be the end to your dreams and goals."

It was an annoying but just argument.

I shouldn't have remained there.

If I really want to save my little sister, I should have bailed out of there.

Thus, that was my naivety. My foolhardiness. My hero-syndrome. My weakness.

Shiro continues.

"But you stayed. You stayed and saved the Gunjou's life and the world. Like a hero. A hero with a horrible personality."

"....."

"So, who on earth is our Lord Hero?"

I reply in exasperation to those perfect words that were coated with a just argument.

"A fool."

This time for real, I turn my back towards Shiro. Conversations are meaningless. Since neither of us is willing to tell the truth.

But Shiro continues.

"Well, in truth, I did do a small check and got to know just one thing."

"....."

I didn't turn around. But, in other words, that's what it means. In the end, this guy belongs to that world. Investigating me and getting close to me with a motive. All those noisy proclamations about liking me, being my friends and comrades were all an act.

His actions were all for the sake of using me for his own goals. Moving rationally, in a calm and collected way. Escaping when it's time to escape. It's a story of the world that I'm well familiar with, and having him show that kind of attitude without calling me a comrade makes me very much relieved.

I didn't turn around.

Shiro says.

"According to my investigation....."

Not interested.

"That fool is good at Enka. Average at J-Pop. And also, despite his protests, he enjoys karaoke, which is really cute."

"....."

A provocation. In order to make me turn around. I won't turn around anymore.

"When I told you that I like you, it's the truth, Shinnosuke. Besides, you're my life savior. So, let's become real comrades. If you're willing to believe me, I'll tell you my secrets honestly."

Not interested.

"Hey Shinnosuke. Face me. Become our comrade."

Not interested.

"Shinnosuke. I already showed you my sincerity. I have the power to do a background check on you, but I'm not doing it. I want to make you my comrade purely because I've really taken a liking to you."

How much of those words should I believe? And even if I believe in them, how does it matter to me?

What Shiro just said has revealed a little about himself. He has the power to do background checks --- in other words, he belongs to a certain organization from someplace. Since one will require a large amount of power to investigate my past. In that case, he probably is someone who belongs to another organization different from Kichijouji High or Taikou Pharmaceuticals.

It adds up. Both Yousuke and Himi are also people from that organization. That's why they will never increase their comrades. Staying here without attracting too much attention, while at the time, they play an active role to a certain degree in order to boost their right to speak up in school.

I narrow my eyes.

I consider the possibility of Shiro being stronger than me. I consider the possibility of Shiro being more capable than me. I tap my right index finger twice, and start moving my thigh to a rhythm. Twirling my finger.

I ready myself to use magic.

I ready myself to use the 《Headphone Fuzz》 worn over my right ear.

The 《Headphone Fuzz》 I'm wearing is German-made.

《Willer Corp. Manufactured Prototype 42》 .

It's a 《Headphone Fuzz》 that places an abnormally large burden on one's brain and body and is not something a normal person can wear.

Just as I'm about to activate it ---

Shiro then says.

"You're strong. But you can't beat me."

Another provocation.

But,

"..... irritating, so maybe I should just take up that provocation."

Except for Shiro and his gang. the rest of my classmates have already vacated the gymnasium.

I snap my finger twice, and as my 《Headphone Fuzz》 is activating, I turn around.

Shiro did not activate his magic.

However, behind him, Yousuke and Himi enter into combat mode. They snap their fingers and activate their headphones.

Shiro smile, his face full of confidence, and look intently at me.

"I've already seen the magic you loaded into your 《Headphone Fuzz》 . If Himi lays her traps and with Yousuke protecting me, you won't be able to defend against my attacks."

"....."

"You're strong but you don't have any comrades. You won't be able to achieve your objective alone right? That's why I shall become your comrade. Now, take my hand. Let's become comrades."

And he extends his hand to me.

"I'll protect you."

"Ha, don't make me laugh."

"I won't betray my comrades. While I don't know what has twisted you so much....."

"And you're pretty pushy in your persuasion. It's stifling."

"Let me inside that dark world you live in. Let me carry that baggage that's burdening you. I'll pull you along with me."

"Shut up. I'm tired of that friend-facade of yours....."

"Trust me, Shinnosuke."

"....."

I activated my magic. My finger dance in the air. A trail of solid-looking light swims.

My 《Headphone Fuzz》 resounds.

My 《Headphone Fuzz》 resounds.

Both Yousuke and Himi react to that. They seem like they are about to activate their magic, but it's too late.

The song magic is already overflowing my brain matter.

The cursed song keeps replaying inside my brain.

Repetitively, repetitively, repetitively, the curse carefully sings.

【In an instant ♪ In a flash ♪ In the time of a flash ♪

The flash of time, the flash of an instant ♪ In an instant ♪ In a flash
_____】

I murmur.

"..... Acceleration switch."

Clink, a switch flips in my body.

My magic activates.

My body accelerates.

My body can only accelerate for just a second.

But in that one second, I can kill even God.

I take a step forward.

And kick the floor.

Shiro reacts to that. He twists his body and lowers it,

"Yousuke, Himi, don't use your magic! I'll take him on!"

He orders.

Both the faces of Yousuke and Himi turn to surprise.

But it doesn't matter. I rush forward. I aim for Shiro's cheek with the bottom of my palm.

Shiro couldn't react. He readily took my attack. His head jerks upward so flashily that it seems like his head might just get ripped off. He probably won't be able to stand anymore. His head is swinging. Looking at him, I wonder what on earth he was thinking. How can he protect me if he's weaker than me?

However, for some reason, Shiro did not fall. He did not leave me. Even though his body was limp from the damage, before I knew it, he has grabbed my collar.

"Let me go....."

As I said coldly, Shiro smiled.

"..... don't wanna. I won't let you go. And also, I've proven to you one more thing."

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"I've showed you that I believed that you wouldn't kill me....."

"....."

"And I also showed you that I won't attack a person whom I think of as a comrade."

"....."

"Hey Shinnosuke. Don't get so worked up and let's go to the karaoke together again. I need a comrade like you....."

But, I grab the arm of Shiro, and while pulling him away from me, I say,

"..... jeez, what's with you? It's annoying. I don't have time to indulge in your nonsense....."

At that moment, Shiro's face suddenly becomes serious, and he says in a low voice.

"My enemy is Kichijouji High. I've come here to crush this school. It's not for something personal. It's a mission. Is that aligned with your goal? Can we become comrades?"

I look hard at Shiro's face.

It seems like he's telling the truth. More like, if it weren't the truth, he wouldn't be able to say such a thing. Kichijouji High is a place that is capable of disposing students nonchalantly. It's a place where there wouldn't be a problem even if someone dies during an interview.

In that case, if this were to leak out, it would be possible that Shiro would be terminated.

But, why would he tell me that?

Does he need my trust that badly?

I have no idea.

"If that's the truth..... and after hearing such a secret, I still tell you I won't become your comrade, what will you do?"

Shiro then says right away.

"I'll kill you."

I can tell that Yousuke and Himi behind him have already prepared their magic. Magic for the purpose of killing me. Right now, I'm defenseless, and probably won't be able to defend against them at this distance.

But there isn't any need to defend against them. Since I can just pretend to become their comrade.

So I say.

"Got it. I'll become your comrade."

Shiro smiles, and says readily.

"That's great. I believe in you."

On hearing that, I say without thinking.

"..... huh? That's really weird, don't you think? What kind of reason is there to believe in me?"

Shiro then smiles.

"Haha, well, you saved my life, and I know that you're a good guy..... isn't it, Yousuke?"

Yousuke behind him undoes his magic, and steps forward.

"Yeah. He also got worried about my wounds. Besides....."

He then turns to look in the direction of Himi. Himi then looks a little embarrassed and steps forward happily.

"I..... I managed to register on my friend list with my Intimate switch as well....."

"So what? You guys are weird."

Those reasons don't cut it enough for them to believe in me. They aren't reasons enough for them to want me and put themselves in a dangerous position consequently.

But Shiro continues.

"The one who's weird is you. Why did you save me? Why did you save the world? Is there a reason behind all that?"

"....."

"More importantly, the reason why I decided to trust you, is because, when I said the words 『terminate the diseased girl』 , for an instant, for just an instant, you had a displeased look on your face. Did you realize that?"

My eyes widen on hearing that. At my own foolishness. At my own naivety. At Shiro seeing through all that.

I push Shiro's chest away from me.

But Shiro goes on.

"While I don't know why you are here in this school....."

"For money."

"Haha, doesn't matter. But I think that you're a good guy. Thus, I shall become a friend who trusts you....."

"Shut up, son of a gun."

Shiro smiles kindly. That face really pisses me off.

Shiro continues.

"There are few people I can become comrades with in this school. Everyone is desperate to stay alive, and there are few who would risk their lives for others. So..... join hands with us."

But, I face my back towards Shiro and his gang. I don't feel like talking anymore to them.

Then, Yousuke says from behind,

"..... hey Shiro, aren't we rushing things a little too soon? Since that guy definitely never had any friends till now, he's probably embarrassed and would mope around for a while....."

"I can hear you!"

I holler and Shiro smiles.

"We want you to hear it."

Beside them, Himi lowers her head towards me as if she's feeling apologetic. At the very least, seems like they're aware that they're doing something unpleasant, but her lowered head makes even more pissed.

Don't tell me those three have been having conversations like, "That fella seems like he doesn't like killing diseased girls, isn't he a good guy?", among themselves? When I thought about that, my annoyance went over and,

"Haah....."

I could only let out of sigh out of weariness.

It doesn't matter whether or not I became their friends or comrades. In the end, I still didn't tell them a thing. Thus, they were disclosing way too much about themselves.

But why would they do such a thing? In the world I knew about, there wasn't a single soul who say such naive things.

Rather, those who did died.

The moment they believed in someone, they died.

The moment they let their guard down towards someone, they died.

The moment they attempted to protect someone, they died.

The world isn't so cheery. The people around the labyrinths with spoils that could be converted to military technologies are all rotten.

But then,

"....."

Will these guys also die?

I look at Shiro and gang. Unbelievably, the thought of them dying felt a little unpleasant..... and when I realized those feelings of mine..... I felt like dying.

It's like I was that 『good guy』 that Shiro talked about. And I know very well that such a 『good guy』 won't accomplish anything.

Thus, once again, I sigh deeply,

"..... damn, whenever I'm with these fellows, I'm not myself."

I groan as I exit the gymnasium.

Chapter 2 - The Spire that Pierces the Sky

Classroom.

In the middle of lessons.

Sixth hour period ---

Before the blackboard, a white-haired teacher is conducting a class on 『Moral』 education.

Outside of the time spent in killing girls, the students in the 『Labyrinth Diseased Girl Killing Curriculum』 also attend normal lessons to a certain degree.

While I'm deeply interested as to what kind of morals and ethics do they plan on teaching students who kill young girls to save the world, since what I learn here won't help me in raiding labyrinths, I look out the window, not paying any attention.

Today is the 2nd of December.

It's winter.

It is snowing lightly. In the past, you would hardly see any snow in Tokyo in the month of December, but since the young girls of the world started contracting the 『Labyrinth Disease』, developing countries and several developed countries were wiped out and thereafter, snowfall became abundant.

Maybe that was because the reduction in population halted global warming, or maybe it was because of some other reason, I do not know.

"Hey Shinnosuke-kun."

A voice calls out to me from beside me.

It's Kiryuu Kiri.

With long madder red hair, and a well-arranged face. A slender body with large bulging breasts.

She was in a different class until October, but taking advantage of the fact that half the students in our school year had either died or withdrawn from

the school following the Asahi Momoka incident, she transferred to our class, to a seat beside me.

And she calls out to me in an annoying voice.

"Hey hey."

"....."

"Hey hey hey."

"....."

I did not answer.

"Shinnosuke-kun, there's something I want to ask you."

Be it Shiro or Kiri, why is this class made up of annoying people?

"Erm..... on the 24th you know..... 24th of December, Shinnosuke-kun, will you be free?"

She's probably talking about Christmas. I look in the direction of Kiri with a exasperated face, and say.

"..... isn't it a little too early to talk about Christmas? We only just entered December."

Kiri then becomes a little shy,

"Christmas, is great isn't it? When December comes, you can just feel that universal Christmas mood in the streets..... I, really love that atmosphere."

"I hate it. It's dumb."

"So, will you be free?"

"No, I won't."

"Eh, eh, is that because, you'll be spending it with, erm..... a lover?"

"Yeah. That's right. Unlike you who has no partner for Christmas, I'm amazingly popular, and totally not free. All right. That's the end to our meaningless talk. See you."

As I turn back to the window, Kiri says.

"Does that mean you'll be free on Christmas?"



"Didn't I tell you that I have a lover?"

"Lies. Shinnosuke-kun, you look like a really unpleasant guy, so you aren't the type who would have a lover."

"What the hell are you up to?"

"Eh, what're you talking about?"

Without listening to the 『Moral』 education class, I look in the direction of the sleeping Shiro, and Yousuke and Himi around him, who, as expected, are not listening to class as well and are busying themselves with adjusting their 《Headphone Fuzz》s.

They too said a similar thing earlier. Something like since I have no friends due to my horrible personality, they will become my friends.

Of course, I won't deny the part where I have no friends, but I never said I wanted any friends, so please stay away from me.

But yet, Kiri smiles happily.

"So, about Christmas....."

"Not interested."

"Well, erm, there's a place I want to go....."

"Then just go by yourself."

"Since you can't get a girlfriend and will be free for sure, I was wondering, maybe we should go together.

"I'll kick your ass."

"Ah-haha ~"

She smiles happily.

I look at that smiling face of hers. Her face has well-arranged features. She has to be popular. She's also good at winning over people. I really don't see how she would be troubled at not getting a partner for Christmas.

There are still 22 days to Christmas. Provided we don't die of course.

This is that kind of school.

A school where you may just die.

Once again, I look out the window. Snow is starting to pile up.

"Hey don't ignore me ~"

Said Kiri, to which I ignore. I manipulate my 《Headphone Fuzz》 and start playing its song. Accustoming myself to the curse till it is overflowing in my brain. Since if I don't slowly get used to the curse, it will wreck my brain right away.

And while listening to the curse, I ponder a bit.

Kiri is probably here because of some circumstances.

With capabilities like Kiri's, she can acquire money and power even if she didn't come to such a dangerous place. But yet, she's here. She's in such a dangerous place. Why?

"....."

She's strong.

And smart.

Including myself, it is rare for magicians with capabilities like those of Kiri, Shiro, and Gunjou to be gathered in the same place. Since various organizations will be scrambling to pay high prices for magicians of our level. At the very least, Gunjou has 20 corporate sponsors backing her up.

Taikou Pharmaceuticals wants me --- according to Yayoi provided it's true.

Strong magicians, have a military-level worth. With a magician of that level, a corporation can have him or her raid an eternal labyrinth, and bring out a powerful magic technology that might have the possibility of changing the surface of the entire world.

However, four such magicians are assembled at this school right now, and instead of being labeled as those who are in for the money or authority, they are being labeled with a ridiculous name, Hero Team, who is fighting to save the world.

What kind of situation is this?

Is there a reason for this to be happening?

Or could it be just a coincidence?

As I'm watching the snow pile up in the schoolyard, I continue pondering about Gunjou, Kiri, and Shiro. But, in the midst of that, I realize that it's a meaningless thing to do. It's meaningless to think about someone else. I might just die the next moment, or get betrayed the next day, and in the first place, it has nothing to do with saving my little sister Saki.

The bell rings. The sixth hour period has ended. Today's school has ended. I stand up.

Kiri then says.

"Hey Shinnosuke-kun, were you listening to me?"

Of course, I wasn't. I look down at Kiri, shrug, then, with my bag in hand, I start walking out the classroom.

Kiri says.

"Ah, ah, let's go back together."

"Don't want to."

"Eeh."

As we are having that conversation, Gunjou, who is sitting at the front of the classroom, sends a glance toward me. For some reason, she's glowering at me. I return her look with a foolish grin and avert my face. She's the only one who's not being pushy in bending her good will towards me.

Jeez, the frequent preaching about comrades and friends here is really making me vexed.

What's the point of building a pointless friendship when you might just die tomorrow? At any rate, we'll just end up betraying and hurting one another, so, what on earth do these guys want?

Yousuke says.

"Hey Shinnosuke, let's drop by at a nice grill house on the way back, shall we?"

Himi says.

"Recently, we found a really good eatery. Shall we go together?"

Remaining seated, Shiro looks up at me.

"Let's go, Shinnosuke."

Behind me, Kiri raises her hand.

"Ah, I want to go!"

Once again, Gunjou takes a few fleeting glimpses in my direction, then makes a determined-looking face, and stands up.

"Y-You guys sure look like, you're getting along well, but if you think you can raid a labyrinth with that kind of pacifist attit....."

But, I say to that,

"Just shut up."

Ignoring them, I exit the classroom.

"Ah, Shinnosuke-kun!"

Kiri calls out to me, but I close the door to the classroom. Walking along the corridor, I got away from the classroom.

I can see a woman standing at the other end of the corridor.

Navy blue suit. High heels. On her left ear, a 《Headphone Fuzz》 which looks like an earring.

It's our homeroom teacher, Honjou Tsukasa.

Honjou Tsukasa says.

"Ah, are you going back? Shinnosuke-kun."

"Yes."

"Remember to keep your cellphone on standby. We'll call you once a diseased girl appears."

I cock my head to the side and say.

"But, diseased girls should normally get their disease onset before 2pm, I thought."

That's right.

For some reason, this disease only activates between 8am to 2pm.

The onset never happens in the late night, early morning, evening nor at the night.

Since the disease onset only happens in the hours between morning and afternoon, humanity is able to react to it, and the students from the 『Girl Killing Curriculum』 can go home in peace --- that should have been the case but.

Honjou Tsukasa says.

"That should have been the case but..... recently, there was a kid in **Kansai** who got an onset in the evening".

I look at my homeroom teacher. That should have been a big incident. Since a calamity that had never happened before has happened. A great calamity that might wipe out the entire world.

"I didn't see any news on it."

"It's still under wraps."

"And you're telling me?"

Honjou Tsukasa looks hard at me and says.

"Well, you're our important raider. I trust my own students."

"You'll get betrayed you know?"

Honjou Tsukasa smiles.

"Maybe. But even the Japanese government trusts you guys. You all did a distinguished service in saving the 3 million people in Kanagawa."

Hearing those words, I consider the possibility of Honjou Tsukasa and Metropolitan Kichijouji High not knowing about what Taikou Pharmaceuticals did.

That Asahi Momoka incident was artificially caused by Taikou Pharmaceuticals but ---

Do the personnel of Kichijouji High know of this?

Or, Honjou Tsukasa doesn't know of this?

Or, she actually knows but is pretending not to know?

Whichever it is, it doesn't matter to me. There are many instances whereby countries or military-affiliated corporations got blinded by the profits that could be gained from labyrinths and went crazy because of that.

And I have no time to play with them. As long as I could save my little sister Saki, nothing else matters.

I say.

"The one who did that was Gunjou, you know?"

"Even so, it wouldn't have been possible without your support. So feel free to let me know what you want. I'll prepare it for you."

"Did you get a budget increase from the country?"

Such things do happen too.

By getting Taikou Pharmaceuticals to create the incident, they could elevate the name of Kichijouji High if they could suppress the incident. And in the end, the government will increase their budget --- there's a possibility that this was what they had aimed for.

Is the mastermind Taikou Pharmaceuticals?

Or Metropolitan Kichijouji High?

Or the Japanese government?

Like I thought, I shouldn't bother myself about it. I shouldn't get myself involved in it. I don't give a shit about the world.

Upon hearing my question, Honjou Tsukasa smiled happily.

"Even my salary was increased with the budget from the country ~♪. Thanks to you guys. Feels good. So you guys can just feel free to let me know what you need."

"Ha, like installing a sauna in the shower room, or something to that effect?"

But Honjou Tsukasa simply nods.

"If that's what you really want, we'll do it, Arisu Shinnosuke-kun."

Seems like they got a really large-scale budget increase. To the point where we can just splurge on meaningless things.

"And also, you didn't register a bank account with the school, did you? We're going to deposit money into it so please register one. And, please grow much stronger. Use your money to get much stronger. Ah, and also, it's fine even if it's a foreign unlawful account. We have plenty of such guys in this school and so are lax about it."

As she said that, Honjou Tsukasa started walking.

Passing me by.

"....."

And I ponder about what Honjou Tsukasa just said.

What did she mean by that?

--- We have plenty of such guys in this school and so are lax about it.

That meant that they are already used to getting betrayed.

Strong fellows will turn against you quickly. They either get poached by spies from other corporations or countries, or they are spies right from the beginning.

This is true for any country. That's why I don't trust anyone. I don't believe in the word 'comrade'. Friends? Hah. What the hell's that?

"....."

But, right now, Honjou Tsukasa is displaying an attitude that says that she is unconcerned about getting betrayed. It means that the school is already prepared to take in students who will betray them.

It means that they have a policy of accepting anyone as long as one is able to kill labyrinth diseased girls.

And they don't even bother to investigate those who enroll. I too, got into this school without any kind of investigation done on me.

But,

"Won't there be any trouble with that kind of self-assured attitude?"

On hearing me say that, Honjou Tsukasa answers right away.

"None. We know the motives of those who come to this school anyway.
There are only four kinds of people here ~"

I narrow my eyes.

Four kinds of people.

I know instantly what kind they are.

1. Those who have no power nor money and came here despite not wanting to come.
2. Those who want to make a name for themselves here.
3. Those who really want to save the world.

However, those who are truly powerful, probably aren't here because of those three reasons.

If it's for money, they can make it anywhere.

If it's for power, they can get it in other organizations.

In the first place, it's possible to make a name for oneself even without coming here.

In that case, the rest would belong to the fourth type of people.

What is this group actually seeking?

"....."

Honjou Tsukasa halts.

She gives a tap to the wall along the corridor. I look at it. On the other side of the wall --- the land on the other side adjacent to this school is occupied by a certain labyrinth since ten years ago.

The world's most difficult eternal labyrinth which those associated with the military dream of raiding and bringing back technology from it.

The name of that labyrinth is ---

"『Apocalypse 666』. As the name of the diseased girl was Arisu, it's called by its more popular name, 『Apocalypse Alice』. The world's most difficult labyrinth. Anyway, you too came here aiming for that, didn't you? Arisu Shinnosuke-kun."

My homeroom teacher turned around.

Looking and smiling at me.

I didn't smile.

Suddenly, she makes a face as if she had only just realized it,

"Oh my, coincidentally, your name is also Arisu isn't it? Are you a relative or something?"

"No."

"Did you come here to save her or something?"

"Certainly not."

Honjou Tsukasa smiles on hearing that.

"Well, even you won't go that far, as one would expect ~ After all, there isn't any idiot who would go that far to save a girl who has turned into an eternal labyrinth. Since you can't make any money for saving her."

"....."

"Not to mention that it's said to be impossible."

"....."

"Then, who are you? But I'm not interested at all. Whether you are from a military organization from somewhere, or James Bond from England, feel free to investigate 『Apocalypse Alice』 as much as you like. Since at any rate, you won't be able to raid it. You'll only realize that it's a hell inside, a place where you cannot obtain a single thing."

"....."

"And, while you're realizing that..... or getting killed in the labyrinth..... students with real power who are driven by greed will for some reason gather in my class to save Japan. In the meantime, my bank account will also get saved. Aah, what great kids.

Now! Shinnosuke-kun.

Let's kill the girls and save the world together!"

Pahn, Honjou Tsukasa claps her hands together.

She grins again.

In spite of that, I couldn't smile. Since she said that she didn't need to know my true identity, there's no need for me to act like a good kid as well. Well, setting aside the fact on whether or not I have been acting like a good kid till now.

Honjou Tsukasa looks hard at me, smiles and says.

"Don't glare at me. Since I'll give you money. Also, please don't forget to register your bank account number. The Japanese government is expecting great things from you."

She turns her back to me.

And proceeds to the classroom.

I look intently at her departing back,

"..... ha, glare? My eyes have always been that way."

And smile.

Smirking.

Maybe my eyes look awful when I grin, but right now I'm actually feeling delighted.

The reason is because this place is a familiar world which I once again reacquaint myself with.

Humans are ugly. They can only think of themselves.

Obviously, they won't be thinking about saving others.

The moment one gets pointlessly attached by the words 'friend' or 'comrade', one dies. I've seen that many, many, many times.

"....."

On the other side of the corridor, Gunjou walks out of the classroom.

Honjou Tsukasa looks intently at Gunjou,

"Hi Gunjou! You were great today as well. It's all because of your existence that the world could be saved!"

Go to hell, I thought.

The petite Gunjou looks up at our homeroom teacher. Her face shines with brimming confidence.

"Of course! Who do you think I am! I am none other than Mizuiro Gunjou!"

The usual Gunjou.

And, she has already proven that she is the only one who infiltrates labyrinths not just for purely selfish motives.

Since, in that Asahi Momoka incident, she remained until the end. Drenched in blood as she risked her life, to protect her classmates and to try to save the world, and she had also worried herself sick about my injury.

If there's an unsightly reason as to why she has to be in this school no matter what ---

Then she probably belongs to the,

"..... third kind of people."

I mutter.

3. A fool who truly wants to save the world.

And, I hate those kind of people the most.

Those who belong to the third group are the ones who die most easily, the ones who get used by others most easily, and on top of that, even after they die, they leave a wound in the hearts of those who survive.

I probably would waver if Gunjou were to die, after seeing that weak side of hers. I won't be able to help but feel my heartstrings tugged. No, maybe, I would also waver if Shiro, Himi, Yousuke, or Kiri were to die.

But what use will that kind of feeling have?

This is that kind of place. A place where all might lose their lives tomorrow. If so, then why do people engage in such meaningless stuff?

Like I thought, I shouldn't go to karaoke with them. I shouldn't get close to any of them.

Gunjou is approaching me.

I pretend not to notice and turn my back towards her. I pass through the corridor, and descend the stairs. Our class is on the third floor; I descend all the way to the ground floor, and exit into the schoolyard.

Immediately upon doing that, Gunjou appears alongside me, on my right. Even though she has caught up to me, she is not passing me.

"..... I don't plan to go home with you, you know?"

On hearing that, without looking at me, Gunjou says.

"I'm not planning to go home with you either."

"Huuuh? Then, why aren't you passing me?"

"I've been walking at this speed right from the beginning. I should be the one telling you not to walk alongside me."

While saying that, she continues walking at my pace. Does she have something she wants to tell me? Really depressing.

At that moment, a group of students around us look at us.

"Oh, it's Mizuiro Gunjou-san."

"The one beside her, is Arisu Shinnosuke-kun right?"

"You're kidding me, two members of the hero team that saved Kanagawa?"

"Are they going out?"

I turn my eyes in the direction of those gossiping girls and say with half-opened eyes.

"Yes. You got that right. We're actually on our way to a love hotel."

"What!? Hey!?"

Gunjou looks up at me with an adorably blushing face. And grabs my arm firmly. Looks like she's angry.

But the girls just go wild with cries of 'Kyaa' at that

Gunjou says frantically,

"T-That's, not."

Cutting her off, I say.

"Then stop fawning over me, it's depressing. You will be seen as an easy woman, you know."

"Don't mess with me!"

Gunjou moves her right hand. It's a chop. I try to grab that arm of hers, but the path of her hand changes. I take a step backward. Matching me, Gunjou takes a step forward.

As expected of the top of the school year.

Her movements are nimble, but --- our hands clash several times, and finally, I grab Gunjou's arm. In the end, I'm the faster one.

Behind me,

"Wow, amazing, what's that? I couldn't see a thing. Are they human?"

Said a guy, and following that,

"A lover's quarrel, a lover's quarrel....."

A girl said something that's off the mark but I don't really care.

From below me, Gunjou glares at me with upturned eyes.

"Let me go. Or I'll kill you."

"Maybe I should just bring you to the hotel I'm putting up at."

"You."

She snaps her fingers. Her 《Headphone Fuzz》 starts playing. As she prepares to use her magic.

I let go of her arm and take a step backward,

"Just kidding. If the top of the grade Lady Gunjou sets her eyes on me, I'll get killed ~"

With her face red, she continues to glare at me,

"..... why....."

Glowering at me in chagrin, she says.

"..... why do you keep saying things to push me away....."

I smirk at that and reply.

"Obviously it's because I hate you."

"Uwu....."

"And you hate me too right?"

"I, I hate you."

"Then we're on the same page right? So stop getting close to me."

"I'm not getting close to you!"

"That so? That's great then. Well, goodbye and farewell."

I wave to Gunjou and turn my back towards her. Once again, I start walking towards the hotel I'm putting up at.

But, there and then,

"....."

Once again, Gunjou is walking along my side.

With a fed-up face, I look down at the petite Gunjou, and say.

"Look, can you stop following me?"

However, she seems to be bent on ignoring my words.

"T-There's just one thing, I want to ask you."

"I have none."

"..... I, have been wondering about..... how's your injury....."

By injury, she's referring to the injury I got from saving her during that Asahi Momoka incident. There was a period when we thought that my right leg would be limp forever, but that was not Gunjou's fault, but a result of my cousin Yayoi fiddling with it.

That's why she doesn't need to worry about it, and if she's really concerned, I did tell her to give me some money though.

Appearing concerned, she takes a few glances at me and says.

"..... today..... during the maneuvers..... you, don't seem too well so..... I thought maybe it's because of your injury....."

"It's none of your business right?"

"But that injury is because of me....."

"Then why don't we go ascertain it at the hotel? I mean, it'd be clear once I take off my clothes right?"

On hearing that, Gunjou's face turns bright red again, then flashes into a visage of anger, and she raises her fist. And hits me on the shoulder.

"..... and here, I was being worried!"

She said.

I look down at her,

"....."

It's really exasperating.

Even though she always has a high and mighty attitude, she really has a good personality. And it's because that somehow the thought of really not wanting her to die that I have is what exasperates me.

Despite the fact that people die here.

Despite the fact that they can die easily.

It's dangerous to have emotions for another. It's pointless. Inefficient. But, no matter how much displeasure I expressed, for some reason, she doesn't stay away from me. That goes the same for Shiro, Kiri, Yousuke, and Himi.

It'd be understandable if they had shown they had ulterior motives or something to gain from me but ---

"Hey Gunjou. I also have something to talk to you about."

I said as I took Gunjou's hand that had been used to hit me.

She then looks up at me with a worried face.

"Ah, ah, your injury really hurts right?"

But I shake my head and reply. Looking intently into her almond-shaped, yet large eyes,

"I don't hate you."

"Eh.....!?"

Surprised, her eyes became even larger.

But unconcerned, I continue.

"It's because you are cute."

"Eh!? Er-Erm....."

"Because your brain matter is so adorable that I wonder whether you're actually an idiot."

"Gah!?"

"Because you are a good girl with a beautiful heart."

"..... uhn? Ah, erhm ~"

Not knowing whether I was speaking ill of her or praising her, her face appeared confused,

"So what're you trying to tell me!?"

She got angry.

I looked down at that foolish-looking, lovely Gunjou and say.

"In the past, all the girls I love died. My friends died too. They either died in the labyrinth, or got caught and died by the hands of those who sought to use my power, or died from the attacks of opposing organizations. No matter what, they just died died died, easily."

"....."

Gunjou looks intently at me.

I continue.

"And, you might just die tomorrow. I might just die today. So, is there even any meaning to our conversation.....? Is your injury ok? Haha, what the hell's that?"

That's a question which Gunjou should be asking herself on a daily basis. Even if that's not the case, because she had lost a number of her classmate comrades during the Asahi Momoka incident; because she has such a strong sense of responsibility that she secretly vomited in the toilet from the anxiety that had stemmed from her desire of wanting to protect everyone and clear the labyrinth without getting anyone killed; and thus,

"What are the feelings you have towards me? Don't tell me it's love?"

"Well....."

"Probably not. You are just a little tired. You are just tired of seeing too many of your classmates die. That's why you just want a comrade who's a little stronger and who won't die so easily. Isn't that right?"

"....."

Gunjou glared at me without saying anything.

Because I was right. Since she too has vaguely realized the meaningless softness in her heart.

Basically, establishing cozy relationships with labyrinth raiders is meaningless. If one gets distracted by emotions, one will be unable to make swift judgments and that will only increase the danger. When it's time to abandon someone, it's necessary to abandon even one's lover.

She knows that too. Otherwise, she wouldn't have gotten this strong. She too is a resident of this dark world.

I nod.

"See, everything's cleared up now. I have a goal that I want to achieve. You too have a reason for being here right? Be it romance, love, friendship, all of them are hindrances. So, stop spewing pointless things and stay away from me. If you need a guy look for Shiro."

Gunjou continues to glare at me, still not saying anything.

But our conversation has ended.

I turn my back to her and once again start walking.

From behind me, she says.

"Th-Then..... then why did you save me?"

"....."

"There wasn't, any need to save me back there. You should have escaped. But yet, you....."

I reply right away.

"I regretted that. Because of you, I got an idiotic injury."

"Eh, ah..... sorry....."

I exit the school gates. Gunjou's voice fades from my hearing. But there's no need to listen. Since she has nothing, neither friends, nor lovers.

At that moment, Pihh Pihh Pihh, the siren sounded.

It was the signal for the appearance of a diseased girl.

"Attention to all students of Girl Killing Curriculum. Please return to your classroom ASAP. A labyrinth disease victim has appeared in Toda city of Saitama Prefecture. We'll be starting the lesson for the purpose of killing the girl."

I turn around to face the school.

The students of the normal curriculum are hurrying out of the school, but the place that the diseased girl has appeared is not here in Tokyo.

It's Saitama.

Class will be starting again.

The lesson in killing the girl.

Just as I'm about to head back to school, I notice that the cellphone in my pocket is vibrating. Maybe it's our homeroom teacher Honjou Tsukasa, I thought, but the one who's calling is somebody else.

I pick up the call.

"Shinnosuke?"

A slightly high-pitched voice of a man. And strangely accented, bad Japanese.

His name is Liezel Baimeister.

A German.

16 years old.

The engineer who custom-boosted my 《Headphone Fuzz》 to illegal levels that would harm the human body.

"..... won't you get eavesdropped?"

"Who do you think I am?"

"A freak scientist."

"Are you praising me?"

"Well, yeah. But my cellphone may be tapped by the Japanese government or Taikou Pharmaceuticals."

"Not may be. It's being tapped. Currently, 3 corporations and a government is tapping your cellphone."

"Oh, who're they?"

"「Taikou Pharmaceuticals」, 「Phillip」, 「Kiryuuki Group」. China."

"Hmm, how about Japan?"

"They're not bothering with you, I suppose."

"Haha, that'll be good if it's true. So, what's up?"

"It's been a while and I want to meet you."

"Germany is too far."

"I'm in Japan now."

"Ah? Why?"

But, at that moment, Liezel's words stop.

"Hn..... wait a minute. I'm being hacked. The fella's kind of good."

"Shall I call you back?"

"No, I can handle it..... hn? What's this, I got a message. I'll kill whoever touches my Onii-sama.....? What the hell, it's creepy."

It's Yayoi.

Sanae Yayo.

My cousin who has been made in charge of a Taikou Pharmaceuticals research lab at the age of just fifteen.

She's the only person who would call me 'Onii-sama'. My real little sister Saki called me 'Onii-chan' but for some reason, my cousin calls me 'Onii-sama'. I don't get the meaning of this at all.

I say.

"That would be from 『Taikou Pharmaceuticals』 ."

"She's pretty good. Can I hang up for a sec? I'm going to send her a virus to kill her."

"By the way, she's probably my cousin."

"I see. So what? She's not taking orders from you."

That's the kind of guy Liezel is. We are just connected by money and from having an aligned interest.

And that interest is that, both Liezel and I have no interest in the world's governments, corporations, nor people, and are just seeking technology that can't be turned into profits.

I say.

"I can hang up, but tell me. Why did you call me? Are you short on development funds again?"

Liezcel then says.

"No, that's not it. I've completed the Holy Sword switch."

For an instant, my breathing must have stopped. Following that, I make a small, dumb-sounding, surprised utterance,

"Wha."

Holy Sword switch --- that's the name of the magic that was being developed for the purpose of saving labyrinth diseased girls.

A magic for the purpose of severing the labyrinth away from the diseased girl.

If that has been completed, then even saving girls who have turned into eternal labyrinths, which was previously thought to be impossible, could be done.

In other words, I've just gotten to first base to saving Saki. It's no longer a dream. My words are no longer the ramblings of a fool.

Just as I'm about to say something further to Liezel, he says,

"I'm hanging up. I'm going to kill your little sister."

The call ended.

"My....."

I look intently at my cellphone with half-opened eyes, then start manipulating it. Searching the Internet, I found the general contact number of Taikou Pharmaceuticals and dial it.

The number connects immediately.

But it doesn't connect to the general reception. The redirect tone sounds, and it immediately connects to my cousin, Sanae Yayoi.

"O-Onii-sama! You've finally decided to come to our side....."

I cut her off and say.

"It's really creepy so stop eavesdropping on me."

"I'm not doing that now! Someone's trying to harm you and interfering with the tap! But I'll get rid of the hindrance immediately....."

"Stop that right now. Otherwise you'll be killed."

But for some reason, Yayoi says happily,

"Ah! Ah! Are you worried about me!? Like I thought, Onii-sama, you're really kind....."

"Shut up. Just stop."

"I'll be fine! While you weren't around all this while, as a researcher."

"I'm telling you to stop. If you stop, I'll join your organization."

Instantly, it's easy to tell Yayoi's voice jump.

"I-Is that true!? I'll stop right away! I'll stop now!"

It's a lie of course.

I'll never become the comrade of the people who force the onset of the disease in a girl through human experimentation. However, there's no need to tell her that.

"O-O-Onii-sama! Eh-hehe..... we'll be together from now on....."

I ignore her and cut the line.

Upon doing that, a voice sounds behind me.

"H-Hey Shinnosuke! What're you doing! A diseased girl has appeared! Aren't you going back? The lesson is starting!"

It's the voice of Gunjou.

I turn around. And look at her with half-opened eyes.

With a angry-looking, yet somewhat troubled-looking face, she looks hard at me.

My cellphone rings again. I pick up the call.

"..... the hacking suddenly stopped with your call to Taikou Pharmaceuticals. Did you ask them to stop?"

It's Liezel. Sounding a little annoyed.

"Well."

"If you interfere with me having fun, I'll kill even you."

"Ha, try it."

"Aah, I shall do that."

He said. Snap snap snap, I snap my fingers. Setting my 《Headphone Fuzz》 in motion. In order to deal with anything that might happen ---

At that moment, from the street behind me, I can hear the screeching sound of tires. The grind of an engine. The sound of an automobile closing in one me.

But, I did not turn around. I merely fill my brain with the cursed song overflowing from my 《Headphone Fuzz》 .

【In an instant ♪ In a flash ♪ In the time of a flash ♪

The flash of time, the flash of an instant ♪ In an instant ♪ In a flash
_____】

I murmur.

"..... Acceleration switch ---"

A switch flips in my body.

Magic spreads throughout my whole body and accelerates my flesh. I can only accelerate for just one second. But, that would be enough.

I kick the ground and jump. A single automobile that's trying to run me down thrusts into the place where I was originally at.

An Audi SUV.

It drives up onto the pavement, and stops. There is no driver. Neither is there anyone in the front passenger seat. In the rear passenger seats, a beautiful teenage boy with blond hair is sitting there with a grin on his face.

It's Liezel Baimeister.

I land on the bonnet of the car. I glare at Liezel through the windshield.

While smiling delightedly, Liezel points to the car and moves his mouth. Even though I can't hear him, I can tell that he said,

"Hurry up and hop on, trash."

In German.

I get off the bonnet. And open the door to the rear passenger seats.

"Shinnosuke!"

Said Gunjou.

I turn around.

"What?"

"Where're you going?"

"I have no obligation to tell you, do I?"

"A diseased girl has appeared."

"So?"

"Guh....."

Gunjou glares at me. She then looks hard at the Liezel who's behind me, inside the car, and says.

"..... I thought you said you have no comrades?"

"This is no comrade."

Liezcel then smiles mockingly from inside the car.

"Hahaha, who's she? Your acquaintance? What is a 'comrade'?"

Gunjou scowls.

Ignoring her, I get into the car.

Liezel taps the 《Headphone Fuzz》 attached to his left ear with his finger and then says.

"Hurry up and close the door, Shinnosuke. If you don't close the door, I can't enable the car's auto function. Jeez, what an idiotic safety feature. I'll reprogram it later."

"Shinnosuke!"

"What."

"I, I'm going back to school!"

"....."

"I'll attend the class, and enter the labyrinth. And then save the world. Because if I don't do it..... if we don't do it, then, lots of people will get swallowed by the labyrinth and die."

She really is a fool.



A good girl.

I should stay away from her.

"Do as you like."

"....."

For some reason, Gunjou looks hard at me with a sad-looking face. Her face looks as if she's looking at me for help.

At that moment, Liezel looks at Gunjou and says.

"What's wrong with her? Annoying. Shall I kill her?"

He starts rotating his finger in the air. This kid is strong. Terribly strong. A person who doesn't live in a world that's soft, warm, and peaceful, he's not someone Gunjou might be able to beat. I grab that hand of his.

"Stop, Liezel. She's my classmate."

"So?"

"If you lay a finger on her, I'll kill you."

Liezcel looks at me. Showing a tinge of surprise, his green eyes stare at me with deep interest,

"Uhn? Don't tell me she's really your comrade?"

"None of your business."

"Well, whatever. You owe me one. And also, if you do something that displeases me, I'll immediately take her as a hostage to threaten you."

He's serious.

I look hard at Liezel, and turn my eyes towards Gunjou with a scowl on my face.

Snow is falling.

Gunjou is still looking intently at me with a sad-looking face.

Why is she making such a face?

"Shinnosuke!"

Gunjou says again. She goes on to say something more, but I have closed the door and can't hear her.

Liezcel taps his 《Headphone Fuzz》 and says.

"Drive on."

The engine howls. The steering wheel turns by itself. The car collides into the guardrail, turn sharply, then forcibly drives itself back to the road.

My cellphone rings.

It's my homeroom teacher Honjou Tsukasa.

"Hello."

"What're you doing Shinnosuke! A diseased girl has appeared. Come back quickly!"

"Sorry. I'm having a stomach-ache."

"..... do you intend to betray our expectations?"

Even though I have no obligation to reply.

"No, besides, I won't be heading too far out. I should be able to get back in the middle of class."

"..... I see. Then, it's fine. The labyrinth this time has a modest raid difficulty of 0.5, with Gunjou, Shiro, and Kiri, our class will take the top spot again anyway."

At present, humanity can clear a rank 12 eternal labyrinth that has no time limit without incurring any casualties.

And, the rank this time is 0.5.

Even though it has a time limit, with those members in our class, it should be an easy win.

As long as it doesn't suddenly turn into an irregular situation like that Asahi Momoka incident.

In other words, the difficulty level this time is low. Which means that it'll be hard for people to die. Knowing that, I feel a little relieved. Following that, I

scowl, not knowing why I'm feeling relieved. Perhaps it's because Shiro, Yousuke, Himi, Gunjou and Kiri probably won't die this time.

"But if you don't make it in time for the raid, you'll incur a penalty."

"Understood."

What kind of penalty? Like not getting a sauna installed?

"Jeez. Gunjou is also not here, I have to call her next..... wait, ah, she came back. All right! With Gunjou and Shiro it'd be an easy win. All right, let's all get started. The time limit is six hours! Let's quickly kill the girl and save the world....."

I hang up.

Liezel, who's sitting beside me, grins and says to me.

"You sure are popular. I didn't expect you to be working as an idol in Japan, huh?"

"Unfortunately I'm better at Enka."

"Huh?"

"Doesn't matter. More importantly, let's get to the main topic."

Liezel then snaps his fingers. A small, translucent dagger-like object appears in his hand.

It's the holy sword.

It has the same appearance of the dagger conjured when I use the Holy Sword switch. But it's not the real thing. It's probably a 3D image of the magic that's currently being developed.

"This?"

Liezel nods at my query.

"Yeah."

"Looks the same to me."

"If you want its appearance changed, I can change it for you but it'll take some time."

"No, it's fine the way it is. So, how completed is it?"

Liezcel answers right away.

"In theory, it should be able to completely sever the disease away from the heart of the diseased girl."

It was already able to do that previously. Severing the disease and killing the girl as a result. But it would be meaningless if the girl dies. Even so, I thought maybe I could save Asahi Momoko and ended up using the Holy Sword switch but --- in the end, it's useless.

Asahi Momoko died.

Holy Sword switch was incomplete.

I ask.

"After severing it, what happens to the girl?"

"Anyone's guess. In theory, the girl should return to her normal state but --- she might still die. However, whichever the case, you came to this school for the purpose of doing trials right? To this Kichijouji High that kills tons of girls."

That's right.

I came here for the sake of doing that.

Even if I don't conduct trials on them, those girls will still be killed, so by using them, I'll perform trials in the hope of saving them. If I can save them with this power, if I can save them ---

"....."

But, that's just an excuse. I too, am performing human experimentation. I have no right to mock Yayoi.

Liezcel asks me.

"Have you already tested the Holy Sword switch?"

"Yeah."

"How was it?"

Then, I remember Asahi Momoka. I remember the Asahi Momoka who had thanked me for saving her and her family while she was dying.

I say.

"I almost died."

Liezcel laughs.

"Ah-haha. The Holy Sword switch still has a short-range. But who cares about that. What happened to the girl?"

Doing my best to prevent a grimace from showing on my face, I say.

"She died."

"But you severed the disease?"

"Yeah."

"Then the girl was saved. It seems the girl would have gone to hell if she had died, still afflicted with the labyrinth disease."

I have never heard of such a thing.

Go to hell?

"What're you talking about?"

I say, to which Liezel smiles.

"I thought that if I said that, the good kid Shinnosuke will have less guilt."

What an unnecessary shitty consideration. To top that off, Liezel is looking at me, seemingly having fun from seeing my reaction.

I reply.

"There is no guilt. Any living being will eventually die."

"If you're desperate, just experiment on an eternal labyrinth girl somewhere. Don't choose a girl where you might get killed if you don't manage to save her....."

"Shut up. It's none of your business."

"Well, fine."

"Then, hurry up and get on with the explanation. How completed is it?"

Liezel then says.

"Like I said, in theory, it's completed to the level where you can save them. I'll install it into your 《Headphone Fuzz》 right away."

"Where?"

"I constructed a research lab. Let's do it there. Ah, but before that, blindfold your eyes. I won't tell you where my lab is."

He throws a blindfold-like thing to me. Clearly, he doesn't trust me. But that's the correct attitude. Like me, he doesn't belong to any organization. And that's the reason behind the immense personal power possessed by people who belong to no organization.

Trusting no one.

Never opening up to anyone.

Comrades? Friends? Lovers? Once such words are uttered, one can't save anyone.

"....."

I put on the blindfold and bury my body into the rear passenger seat. Once I shut my eyes, I can feel myself suddenly getting sucked to the depths of a darkness.

The blindfold is probably smeared with a sleep-inducing drug.

In any case, I have no choice but to surrender my body here.

I need that Holy Sword switch.

I need the power to save my little sister.

"....."

Once again, I saw a nightmare inside the darkness.

A dream in which I couldn't save my little sister.

Even as I tried desperately to save my little sister, I couldn't save her ---

I ran inside the darkness.

I ran.

I ran.

I ran to a place where a door stood, from which rays of hope appeared to be seeping through, and I opened that door as if I was anticipating salvation.

Upon doing that, for some reason, I found a karaoke box behind that door.

Shiro was there.

Yousuke was there.

Himi was there.

Kiri was there.

Gunjou was there.

This was probably the weakness inside of me.

"This, dream again....."

I groaned.....



My eyes open.

I am in park.

Lying on a bench.

It is night.

While I can see the moon, I can't see any stars. Before I knew it, the snow had stopped, but it's freezing cold.

"..... guh..... damn that Liezel, what if I froze to death."

He probably would just laugh it off.

I grimace as I get up. My body is stiff from the cold. There is a clock and a street lamp beside the public toilet.

The time is 2142.

I look up at that clock.

"..... the labyrinth raid's already over huh."

Provided that they weren't wiped out.

After a diseased girl appears, after the investigations, by the time the alarm sounds, there is only six hours left to clear the labyrinth.

The class in studying the labyrinth and labyrinth diseased girl takes 5 hours, and the final remaining hour is used for raiding the labyrinth.

When the alarm sounded, it was probably past 1500.

More than 6 hours have already passed.

If the raid wasn't successful, then part of Toda city in Saitama Prefecture would probably have been swallowed by the labyrinth.

I look at my cellphone. I have several missed calls from my homeroom teacher, Honjou Tsukasa.

I return the call. Honjou Tsukasa immediately picks up.

Bah-Bah-Bah-Bah-Bah, I can hear a loud noise. They are probably coming from the propellers of a chopper. They are on the move.

Honjou Tsukasa says.

"You are really late."

"I was shut in the toilet for a long time."

"The labyrinth raid is already over. Gunjou has done plenty of good work again and killed the girl."

Gunjou, was the one who killed the girl, again ---

And the world is saved.

I wonder what kind of face she made when she killed the girl. During both the maneuvers practice and labyrinth raids, whenever Gunjou kills the girl, she'll always have the face that says that she has to become the savior.

Honjou Tsukasa continues.

"Shiro, Kiri, Yousuke and Himi also did well. Maybe you aren't really needed for the hero team perhaps?"

"Maybe ~"

"What have you been doing?"

"I dozed off."

"Don't let this happen again. Otherwise we'll expel you from school."

"That'll be problematic so I'll do my best."

"My, that's a pretty commendable attitude."

"I've been a commendable guy since I was born....."

"Ah yeah yeah, I have no time for that, I'm hanging up. I'm tired as well."

The line got cut. I shrug my shoulders alone. And return the cellphone to my pocket.

I can't afford to get expelled from school now. Since I need to test the magic I just got hold of to see whether or not I can save the girls.

I can't afford to test this on my little sister right away.

"....."

I snap my fingers. And activate my 《Headphone Fuzz》. On doing that, the cursed song starts flowing from the 《Headphone Fuzz》.

【Deceiving the night ♪

Beguiling the world ♪

The darkness that saves the girl of the endless night ♪】

I pull the trigger that will activate the magic. On doing that, a silver sword appears. Shrouded by light, a shining sword. A sword of hypocrisy that resembles a sword that a hero carries.

However, the part of the blade is fake. This was a joke from Liezel who made the design a mismatch for me.

The actual range is shorter than even a knife.

And the true form of the magic resides in that short portion. Once it's stabbed deep into the heart of the girl, it has the power to sever the disease away.

"..... this is the completed product?"

As I murmur, I notice writings inside the 《Headphone Fuzz》 .

The message in the writing is as follows.

"While you were sleeping soundly, I have installed the magic. Though I don't know whether you'll be able to use it effectively. In the instant you stab the girl, if your capacity isn't enough, your head will be blown to smithereens.

"Hey hey, don't joke with me."

"But with this, in theory, you can sever the disease from the girl without killing her. So pay me what you promised me. I'll carry on with my research. Since, with such a short sword, you probably won't even be able to touch the eternal labyrinth diseased girl with the highest level of difficulty in the world --- 《Apocalypse Alice》 ."

Right now, I'll be killed the instant I step into that labyrinth, not to talk about touching her. Since my little sister Saki is of rank 666.

That's why I need to become stronger.

I need to become much stronger.

I also need a limitless amount of money.

The money to boost the magic that I have now. The money for raiding eternal labyrinths. And maybe the money to hire mercenary magician troops for the purpose of raiding 《Apocalypse Alice》 as well.

Anyway, I need a lot more power and money.

I dispel the 《Holy Sword switch》 .

I breathe out a puff of white mist from the cold.

It's terribly quiet.

Alone in the park, I murmur,

"..... ha, I don't have time to make any friends."

And stand up ---

At that moment.

My cellphone rings again.

I don't know who it is.

I pick up the phone.

"Who is it?"

"Onii-sama! Where're you right now!?"

It's Yayoi.

I scowl and say.

"I have nothing to say to....."

"Don't hang up! Please! And, if you're in the area of Kichijouji, please get away quickly! In the skies above Kichijouji --- inside a chopper returning from Saitama..... the labyrinth disease has broken out in Mizuiro Gunjou!"

"Wha."

My eyes widen involuntarily. For a moment, I can't comprehend what Yayoi just said.

The labyrinth disease has broken out in Mizuiro Gunjou.....

The face of Gunjou that I saw today surfaces in my mind.

Her riled up face.

Her sad face.

Her tearful face.

The face that was seeking help.

And, she should have just saved the world. Killed the girl and saved the world.

But yet, that Gunjou has come down with the labyrinth disease.....?

Yayoi says.

"Anyway, just get away from there! Onii..... damn, there's interference..... signal....."

I have no idea whether Yayoi is telling the truth or lying. If she were lying just to call me to her side, it would be a little too elaborate.

Will there be a need to get away immediately?

In which direction should I run?

I have no idea.

Right now, I don't even know whether I'm in Kichijouji or not.

I look at my cellphone. It's clear that there's no signal. Signal interference. Labyrinths can cut out all kinds of scientific waves and signals.

In other words, I might be in Kichijouji.

"Damn, crap....."

I start running. Out of the park. I try to ascertain the address that is adhered to the telephone pole.

However, there is no need for that.

I can hear a voice coming from behind me.

"What, the hell's that!"

"A tower, a blue tower is swelling up!"

It's the labyrinth.

It's a consequence of the labyrinth disease swallowing up the land.

I didn't turn around. I don't have time for that. I start running in the opposite direction of that voice. I might not make it. The labyrinth is at least 2 km in radius, and can grow up to a few hundred km in radius. If the labyrinth this time is at few hundred km scale in size, then it'd been meaningless to run in the first place.

"Please, Gunjou....."

I activate my 《Headphone Fuzz》 . Dancing my finger in the air, using my magic.

【In an instant ♪ In a flash ♪ In the time of a flash ♪
The flash of time, the flash of an instant ♪ In an instant ♪ In a flash
_____】

I murmur.

"Acceleration switch ---"

And accelerate my flesh.

I can accelerate for one second.

But that's totally not enough. I jump. Over the wall, hopping onto the rooftop of a civilian house. I found the main street. And run towards there, zooming to the road. I catch up to a moving bike and hop onto it.

Then, I dismiss my acceleration magic.

"Uwah!?"

The rider is surprised. The bike almost turns over, but I forcibly push it down from the back.

"If you don't want to die, step on it."

The biker says from his helmet.

"W-Who, the hell are you....."

"The labyrinth disease!"

"Eh....."

"This place is going to get swallowed!"

"Eh, what....."

"Step on it!"

"R-Right!"

The biker switches gear. And the biker accelerates sharply. Luckily, the road is clear.

The light is also green.

Will we able to outrun it?

I turn my head around for the first time.

What stands behind me is indeed a tower.

The tall tower opens up a hole in the night sky, and its stoutness is gradually increasing, swallowing up the streets, the people, and the land.

At a dreadful speed.

At this rate, it'll catch up with us.

"..... we, might not make it....."

I murmur.

What can't be done, can't be done.

I can't do anything to escape from getting swallowed up by the labyrinth disease.

The bike accelerates.

But the tower is expanding faster than that.

Becoming huge.

With its scale spreading.

And, just as I thought that we are going to get swallowed in another moment ---

""

The expansion of the labyrinth stops.

What is the scale of that labyrinth? What is its rank? Those are things that I still don't know.

The bike advances.

The tower is gradually getting further.

I face the front and tell the biker.

"Hey, stop. We've outrun it."

"Pew, pew, pew."

The biker's breathing is ragged. I won't want to die from a traffic accident. I tap his shoulder again. And speak into his ear.

"We've outrun it! Relax!"

"R-Really!?"

"Really. So stop. Calm down."

With that, the biker applies the brakes. The speed slowly decreases, and before long, it stops.

I get down from the bike. And turn around again.

The town is in a terrible shape.

Blazing flames that have arisen from car accidents light up the tower in red.

However, even as it is lit in red, that tower is of a fading blue in color.

Blue, azure, ultramarine.

A tower that fits Gunjou's name.

Yayoi probably wasn't lying. That's probably a labyrinth made by Gunjou.

She really came down with the disease.

I look up at that soaring spire that's piercing the sky.....

"..... jeez, this is exasperating."

I murmur softly.

Chapter 3 - Super Hero

0:30 AM

It has been 3 hours since the onset of the disease happened in Gunjou.

I am in the hotel that I'm putting up at, alone, tinkering with and adjusting my 《Headphone Fuzz》.

It is a German 《Headphone Fuzz》 called 《Willer Corp. Manufactured Prototype 42》. Due to the fact that it places an overly large burden on the body and mind, it never entered production, but I went on to ask Liezel to further customize this device to a dangerous level that would immediately destroy the brain if it was not adjusted precisely.

I fiddle with it. Adjust it.

The news stream from the TV in the room, but it never touches on the disease onset that happened earlier in Kichijouji.

The information is being restricted.

Of course.

Since the onset of the labyrinth disease happened in a place that it should not, and at a time that it should not happen.

I finish adjusting my 《Headphone Fuzz》.

No one has contacted me yet.

But, so what if someone did? The labyrinth manifested by Gunjou is probably a hopeless one.

In the first place, in the event that a labyrinth is manifested by someone who is capable of using magic, then that labyrinth will be at an abnormally high level.

And Gunjou is a world-class famous magician. In that case, the labyrinth will probably be at a rank that can't be cleared.

By the way, if it's a rank 12 labyrinth, with sufficient preparation, a magician unit will be able to clear it without incurring any casualty but.

In the case of Asahi Momoka --- based on my experience, she's around rank 20. At such a tough level. People die relentlessly. As for the few of us who cleared that, we might even have become famous around the world.

The team which managed to clear a rank 20 labyrinth without sufficient investigation and within the limited amount of time.

Might even have been called the 『Hero Team』 , I suppose.

"....."

However, in the past, I cleared a labyrinth of up to rank 40.

It was when I was fifteen.

It's a story in an unlawful, irregular, dark world.

A story of an organization managed by a military regime that thought nothing of human lives.

The name of that labyrinth was 《Holy Sword 40》 ---

It was the labyrinth from which I brought back the magic that formed the basis of 《Holy Sword switch》 .

However, we are talking about an eternal labyrinth that had no time limit after all.

After a thorough investigation on the structure of the interior of the labyrinth, a team of 100 magicians was formed after meticulous levels of preparation, sent in, and the whole raid took a total of 1 month and 2 days, and to top it off, the only one who survived till the very end was me.

"....."

At that moment, my cellphone finally rang.

It's my homeroom teacher Honjou Tsukasa.

She's alive huh.

"..... hello."

"Ah, you picked up. So you're alive. Then, come to school now."

"..... because Gunjou turned into a labyrinth?"

"Oh, you already caught wind of it despite skipping the raid? Who did you hear it from? Your classmates?"

I don't have the contacts of my classmates. In the first place,

"I heard that Gunjou's disease broke out while she was on the returning chopper. In other words, the whole class 5's wiped out?"

Meaning that Shiro, Himi, Yousuke, as well as Kiri, have all been swallowed by the labyrinth.

"Oh, you already knew that much. But fortunately, our class 5 which has all the capable students are fine. And you skipped the raid as well."

"My, how did they survive?"

"At that time, Gunjou was riding the chopper which the relief squad was riding. That's why, together with that chopper, both class 1 and class 2 didn't make it. Ah, that Sakuma-sensei whom you tussle with during your interview got caught in it as well, you know?"

"Hmph. None of my business."

"Ah-haha, that goes the same for me. He's useless anyway. At any rate, come to school. Once the results of the investigation from Taikou Pharmaceuticals are out, we'll begin class right away."

But I smile at that.

"In the first place, is the school still there? The skies above Kichouji have been transformed into the labyrinth right?"

Honjou Tsukasa replies.

"That too is a lucky thing. Gunjou's labyrinth is a vertically tall labyrinth and the surrounding area that was enveloped wasn't that wide."

"It's a tower right?"

"Furthermore, thanks to the fact that it largely expanded in the opposite direction of the school, it didn't reach the school. If I'm not wrong, it's about 8km in radius."

That's a very wide area. An incredible number of people were annihilated.

"If the school had been destroyed, then it might be necessary to call in the labyrinth raid team from Kansai region. Rather, I heard that the students in the Kansai region are actually starting class at the same time. But, don't let them butt in. I don't care how good those Kansai brats are, but the ones who will clear the labyrinth is us."

I ask.

"What's the raid level?"

"..... rank 15. We might have a few people dying on us but ~, if it's you, Shinnosuke-kun --- 【Devil-Sword Devil】 , the famous magician in the underworld, it'd be fine right?"

My eyes narrow. Hearing my old lame and meaningless nickname ---

"In the end, you checked on me, didn't you?"

"That's what I heard from the higher ups just now. And we still don't know anything about you save the nickname. Who on earth are you?"

"Just a timid high school student."

"Haha, whatever. But, you're probably the only one who can clear this labyrinth. So please do your best."

That's easy for her to say. I stroke my 《Headphone Fuzz》 in which my demon sword is stored with my finger and attach it to my ear. I have finished adjusting it. I can employ it right away if I were to enter a labyrinth right now.

But,

"If you want me to do it, then please don't lie."

I say reproachingly.

"What do you mean by that?"

"With someone as powerful as Gunjou, it won't be just a rank 15 labyrinth right?"

Honjou Tsukasa then laughs.

"Ah-hahahahahahahaha..... I'm hanging up."

"Don't screw with me. Answer me. What's her rank?"

On hearing that, Honjou Tsukasa replies readily.

"42."

As I thought, it's hopeless.

A time-limited labyrinth with hardly any time for preparation at a rank of 42.

Just the task of infiltration is impossible.

It's the end for Mizuiro Gunjou.

And if we leave her as she is, she'll turn into an eternal labyrinth and her difficulty level will jump up by ten times.

She'll turn into an abnormally difficult labyrinth where entering or touching, let alone saving her, will be impossible.

The same fate as Saki.

No, it was already over for her when the disease manifested in her. Because a diseased girl does not have any options, except to either become an eternal labyrinth or get killed before she turns into one.

"Hey Sensei."

"What is it?"

"You don't really feel like raiding the labyrinth right?"

"But if we don't do it then tens of thousands of people will die."

"I can't really see you as such a person who's concerned about others though."

"Ah-haha, there are quite a number of important people living in that area, and I'd feel really good if we could take care of this --- there's a really big reward for it after all."

An acknowledgeable explanation.

Betting on not her own life but the lives of others, if she succeeds, her fame will rise --- in that case, why not give it a shot?

"I thought that our team might just be able to accomplish it. But, if it's impossible, it's fine to Escape right away. You guys are important pawns for me so I don't really want to lose you. Your value will go up just by entering such a difficult labyrinth."

"....."

"Well, that's how it is, so come over to school. And then, let's quickly kill the girl and save the....."

I cut her off and say coldly.

"Why don't you just tell me to kill Gunjou?"

On hearing that, Honjou Tsukasa laughs. With the sound of mocking laughter.

Then,

"I'll tell that to you as many times as you want if that'd make you do the work. Quickly kill Mizuiro Gunjou, and make me rich. Mr. Goody Hypocrite."

"....."

"Well then, see you at school ~"

She hangs up. I toss my cellphone onto my bed and lie down.

And look up at the ceiling.

"....."

The disease manifested in Gunjou.

Rank 42.

She probably can't be saved anymore. Those who got swallowed by the labyrinth as well.

I shouldn't bother going at all. Up till now, I have never heard of anyone raiding a time-limited rank 42 labyrinth. If anyone did that, it would be suicide. He would be a fool. He would have come down with the 'super-hero' syndrome. That is not the place to play hypocrisy.

"..... I definitely won't go. Saving the world my ass."

I said disgustedly.

"I'm not a fool. I'm not a fool."

I said the same thing twice.

But, if there were someone who could save Gunjou, it would be none other than me. If she becomes rank 420, no one will be able to save her anymore. There's nothing that can be done if we don't take care of it at rank 42.

"....."

On top of that, I have the Holy Sword in my hands.

I have the Holy Sword wielded by the hypocrite, which just might be able to sever the labyrinth disease from a diseased girl.

I snap my fingers. A cursed song flows from the 《Headphone Fuzz》 .

The song of the Holy Sword.

The holy cursed song.

"....."

The news program on TV ends and a variety show starts. Artistes whom I have never seen before are chattering merrily.

A peaceful world. A tranquil world. A safe world. But a world that would have already disappeared if Gunjou hadn't been working hard. A world that would have already disappeared if no one had sacrificed herself.

But no one is thankful. That's because, no matter what kind of danger appears, or what kind of abnormal circumstances there are, a super-heroine like the amazing, foolish and frantic Gunjou would appear and risk her life to do something about it.

"....."

But that's not me. It should not be me. Because I have to save my little sister. Because I have to save my little sister. If that's the case, I shouldn't be using this Holy Sword, which may or may not be completed yet. I shouldn't show this to anyone. And I can't afford to die in the labyrinth as well.

I never can become a super hero.

Thus, I say.

"..... I shall abandon Gunjou."

Up till now, I have been doing that.

Up till now, I have been doing that.

Up till now, I have managed to survived this far from doing that.

Sounds of laughter ring out from the TV. Sounds of fun laughter ring out. I don't know what's so funny about that. Someone made fun of another and they seem to be enjoying themselves tremendously from that. I kick that box that has been projecting a crowd of smiling faces.

I pull its plug and the projection disappears.

The room returns to silence.

Only the sound of the clock can be heard.

The sound of Gunjou's remaining time, ticking away one second at a time.

"..... damn."

I stand up, for a reason that even I do not know.



1:00 AM

《Kichijouji High School》

A dark, dark schoolyard.

A dark school premise.

The only places with their lights switched on are the staff room and the classroom of Class 5.

As I enter the classroom,

"Shinnosuke-kun!"

Kiryuu Kiri stands up.

I look inside the classroom.

Normally filled with twenty people, the classroom of Class 5 has only nine people in it.

Including me, it'll be ten.

Furthermore, putting aside Shiro, Yousuke, Himi and Kiri, I have never seen the other five students. Meaning they aren't students from class 5.

Kiri draws close to me immediately.

"Shinnosuke-kun, did you hear? Gunjou....."

"I already know."

"Ah, ah..... I see. Did you hear it from Sensei?"

I nod. More importantly, how did Kiri and the rest get wind of this?

It was said that Gunjou was in a different chopper from class 5 when her disease manifested. In that case, Kiri and the rest of the students should not have seen her during the onset of the disease. Those who saw would all have already been swallowed by the labyrinth.

And the news about Gunjou having the disease would have been concealed for a while even from the other surviving students.

A labyrinth becomes a highly difficult one when its diseased girl can employ magic. To top it off, Gunjou is the top of our grade. No fool would enter such a labyrinth. If they want to raid the labyrinth --- at the very least, assemble students for the purpose of attending the class, then they should have kept the new under cover.

But, Kiri knows.

From the looks of this turnout, the rest of the students probably know as well.

That's why we have such a small turnout.

Among all the classes, probably only the ten people here will be entering the labyrinth. For class 5, aside from the Hero team, Shiro, Himi, Yousuke, and Kiri, the rest have been 'wiped out'. Meaning that they have Escaped before even entering the labyrinth.

I ask.

"Hey Kiri."

"Hn?"

"How did you know about Gunjou coming down with the disease? Did you hear it from Honjou Tsukasa?"

But, she shakes her head.

"On the way from the labyrinth in Saitama..... I heard it over the radio message from the rescue chopper."

"....."

"They contacted the chopper of class 5 and said that Gunjou looked strange."

"....."

"Then, the people around suddenly started yelling, 'it's the labyrinth disease!' --- and an evacuation order was then given to all the choppers."

"..... that's enough. I got it."

It means that Gunjou's disease onset wasn't hidden from the other students.

Most of the students probably already bailed. Escaping before even entering the labyrinth.

And that's so right that it's almost too right. Rather, I'm surprised to find even ten people here. I should be going back too.

"....."

I look at the five people I don't know.

Three males.

Two females.

They are probably from class 3 and class 4. Class 1 and class 2 were probably swallowed up by the labyrinth.

Among them, a tall, well-featured young man speaks.

"..... oh, you must be the famous Arisu Shinnosuke-kun from the Hero Team! I'm happy to meet you. Let me introduce myself. I'm Santou Taisuke. I transferred here last month, and right now, I'm the top of class 3."

I look at him with half-opened eyes.

The guy called Santou approaches me and says.

"Even though the cowards ran off, the fate of the world rest on us. Let's save the world together!"

He extends his hand to me.

I look down at it in boredom,

"....."

Ignoring it, I return to my seat.

Santou smiles.

"What a shy guy. But anyway, let's give it our all together."

Is this guy saying that for real? Or did he catch the weird superhero syndrome in his head?

Another person, this time a girl, stands up.

"Erhm, everyone, please hear me. I, have a boyfriend who's in class 2....."

I no longer need to hear any further. Since I already know her motive for coming here.

"Erhm, my ability ranks around middle of class 4 so..... even though I might be a burden to the class 5 that's filled with capable people..... I'm willing to do anything! I'm willing do anything I can for this labyrinth raid so please! Save Hiroki!"

Who the hell's Hiroki?

Santou strokes her back trying to calm her down. She is trembling.

The other students look on as well. Well, each and every one of them probably has his or her own reason for raiding this absurd labyrinth I suppose.

Ignoring them, I return to my seat.

I look around the classroom again. As usual, both Himi and Yousuke are sticking close to Shiro like goldfish droppings.

Slumped on his desk, Shiro is sleeping. That's the right move. Right now, it's 1 am, deep into the night. By the time we are done with our lesson and infiltrate the labyrinth within the next 6 hours, it'd already be morning. We'll be in no shape to raid the labyrinth if we are sleep-deprived.

However, if Shiro's taking a nap now, then, it means that he's serious in entering Gunjou's labyrinth.

Kiri takes the seat beside me, and peers into my face.

"..... what?"

She then says.

"Nothing, I just didn't expect you to come."

"Why?"

She merely smiles sadly, and says nothing.

But, from the look of her face, she understands.

That this labyrinth can't be raided.

Gunjou can't be killed.

But I ask,

"In that case, why're you here?"

Kiri appears to ponder a little, and replies.

"..... to save the world, I suppose?"

"I won't ask you anymore."

"Ah-haha."

She smiles sadly again.

While I don't know the meaning behind that, she probably has her own reason as well. A reason whereby she has to enter the labyrinth. Which reminds me, during the Asahi Momoka incident, she never Escaped as well until the very end. Despite having been abandoned by her classmates.

I look at her.

Receiving my gaze with her large eyes,

"I'll feel embarrassed if you stare at me like that ~"

She says and smiles again.

Unlike Gunjou, she's mentally strong. Really strong. Thus, she probably won't tell me whatever I ask. Not that I have any intention of asking though.

I turn my gaze in the direction of the window.

It's snowing again. I hate snow. As it chills my mood.

"Hey Shinnosuke-kun."

Says Kiri.

I did not answer. I just continue to stare into the night outside the window.

"Why did you come?"

"....."

"This raid is a foolhardy one, don't you think?"

"....."

"I think it's better to give up on it..... and also, I've always thought you would be the rational kind in something as precarious as this....."

"....."

"Or, could it be that you are in love with Gunjou-san?"

At that moment, I turn towards Kiri and say.

"Shut up. Then, let's go with that. It's because I love Gunjou so much that I can't help it. I really want to kill her. That's a hobby of mine. A hobby in killing girls. That's the reason why I came to this school. I mean, it's legal to kill girls right?"

I grin foolishly.

But, as if she hasn't been listening to me, Kiri looks hard at me, pouts with a troubled look, and says.

"..... if you were to die at that kind of place, then you wouldn't be able to go on that Christmas date with me."

"Did you just hear what I said? ...That I have a hobby in killing girls. On Christmas, I'll kill you too."

"Ah-haha. All right. Kill me."

"You know....."

But, Kiri says with a serious face.

"Shinnosuke-kun. It's better to go back. This is really a labyrinth that you shouldn't be entering....."

But at that moment, the siren rings.

Biih biih biih.

"Paging all students of the Girl Killing Curriculum. Please head to your classrooms ASAP. In the Musashino area of Tokyo, a labyrinth disease victim has appeared. We'll be the lesson in killing the girl."

It has been close to four hours since Gunjou's disease manifested. The labyrinth investigation by the research institution has probably ended. And that means we have six hours from now before Gunjou transforms into an eternal labyrinth.

Since it is standard to spend five hours to learn about the labyrinth and the labyrinth diseased girl, and the last hour to deal with it.

Shiro's eyes open at the sound of the siren. He scratches his head, then looks in my direction.

Seeing me seated at my seat, he looks a little surprised, then smiles.

"Hey Shinnosuke. I knew you'd come."

Completely opposite of Kiri.

I scowl and say.

"Ah? What the hell're you talking about?"

"You're the type who can't look away from a suffering classmate, aren't you?"

"Don't joke with me."

"Then why did you come? Escaping should have been the no-brainer choice."

"I could ask the same of you. I thought you were on bad terms with Gunjou, weren't you?"

But Shiro answers readily.

"I've said this before, but once someone becomes my comrade even once, I'll never abandon him to the best of my ability. That's my principle."

"I like how you mention that 'to the best of your ability' part."

On hearing that, Shiro shrugs his shoulders.

"It's foolish to throw away my life pointlessly. However, as long as the possibility exists, I won't abandon anyone."

"So, are you going to kill Gunjou? Did she ask you to kill her if she contracts the labyrinth disease?"

Shiro smiles and looks at me.

"I don't see the point of this discussion --- I'm here for the same reason as you, Shinnosuke. Gunjou's the type who would burden herself with everything; she's definitely the good kid who won't want to drag others into the labyrinth disease along with her. That's why I'm going there to kill her. Since she's a comrade."

A good kid.

Comrade.

Friends.

Lovers.

Shiro could actually say all those disgusting, creepy-sounding words with a straight face. I wonder what kind of environment he was brought up in. When I get involved with him --- no, when I get involved with these people, I can't be myself.

"I'm different from you. I'm here for a different reason."

That's right.

I have a reason.

I'm here to test my newly obtained 《Holy Sword switch》 . It's not because of a comrade, or friend, or things like friendship. I'm here to perform human experimentation. I'm not naive. Not weak. There's no way I'm that kind of good guy.....

But, Shiro interrupts.

"Ohh I see. But I don't believe you. You really want to save Gunjou right?"

"....."

"Just admit it. You're....."

"You really piss me off. I really am....."

"A nice guy who just won't admit that."

"We really can't get along. The first person I'm going to kill after entering the labyrinth is you."

"Hahaha."

On hearing our conversation, a girl who I don't know, probably from either class 3 or 4, can't bear it any longer and speaks up.

"Hey! Aren't you guys the Hero Team!? Why're you guys fighting in such a situation!?"

Yousuke then smiles and says.

"No no, they're always like that. But in the end, Shinnosuke went to karaoke with us."

I stand up and kick the desk. The desk flies toward Yousuke who's rattling away like a know-all.

Yousuke holds out his hand calmly.

His magic has already activated.

"Reverse Force switch ---"

He murmurs. It's a magic that Yousuke's good at. And I know that magic.

An invisible abstract space gets created before Yousuke's hand, and within that space, he's able to freely manipulate the strength and position of gravity to a certain extent.

The desk gets pulled violently by the strong gravity. And it flies towards the young man called Santou.

"Eh, ah, hey."

Santou dodges the desk. Just in the nick of time. Behind him, the girl who has a boyfriend in class 2 is unable to dodge it.

"Ugh."

She can't even scream.

"Rebound."

Says Yousuke. The desk stops right in the middle of the air, and then, losing its momentum, it drops down to the floor. After ascertaining that, he says,

"..... ah ~, from their movements just now, they probably won't be of much use Shiro."

Shiro nods.

"Yeah. If you guys are coming along for this labyrinth raid, then fill up all your slots in your 《Headphone Fuzz》 with support-class magic."

On hearing that, Santou says.

"Hey, wait a minute. I'm the top of class 3 after all ---"

But, cutting him off, Yousuke says.

"Himi, show him."

Himi looks surprised at suddenly being called, and with a fearful face,

"Eh? Erhm, me?"

"We have to make things clear to our comrades before class starts, don't we?"

"Erhm but....."

"Just do it ~"

Looking flustered, Himi stands up hesitantly. Turning to face Santou. She stands before him.

As Santou is tall, and Himi has a slender body, there is quite a contrast between their builds.

Yousuke says.

"By the way, in our team, Himi's physical prowess is not high, and offensive magic is not her forte either. But, as she's good at support magic, she wields only support magic."

Santou looks down at Himi. She still appears to be afraid.

"Haah..... and? Could it be that you're trying to tell me that I'm weaker than her?"

On hearing Santou's words, Himi replies.

"Erhm, well, then, I'll give you a slap, please dodge it."

"That'll be a breeze....."

"Here I come."

Himi whips up her hand. Santou tries to dodge it, but immediately after that, pahn, the sound of an impact on his cheek resounds.

Santou's eyes widen.

"Hey, wait a minute, I let my guard down just now."

"Then I'll do it again. Please dodge it."

Her hand flies up.

"Kuh."

Just as Santou gathers his energy, pahn, the sound of impact on his cheek rings out.

Even though Santou has a face showing that he is clueless as to what happened, nothing great really happened. Santou is just weak.

Himi says apologetically.

"..... I'm sorry for hitting you twice."

Yousuke claps his hands twice and says.

"Well, this is it ~ so let's make things clear. Though I'm stronger than Himi, compared to Shiro, Shinnosuke, and Kiri, my offensive magic is still far below theirs. But I'm good at defensive magic, so I have all my slots filled with defensive magic. I'll do my utmost to protect my comrades in this class, so let's do our best in our own roles."

Following that, the five new students seem to have decided to follow Shiro, Yousuke, and Himi.

But that's none of my business. To top that, Yousuke easily sidestepped my fury because of what he did.

Yousuke looks at me, grinning.

Himi smiles apologetically.

Shiro smirks.

I don't find anything funny.

"..... haah."

I sigh and Kiri says from beside me.

"Shinnosuke-kun, you're like an open book, really cute."

"Can you keep quiet?"

"But, your kindness will get you killed this time."

As if to stop me from going, she touches my hand. And looks up at me worriedly.

I look down at her with half-opened eyes.

"Why're you so worried about me?"

She then smiles.

"..... I wonder why. Maybe I fell in love with you when you saved me?"

"How should I know?"

"Or, maybe it's because I can see your brilliance, Shinnosuke-kun. Even though you live in the same world as me..... and even though you're so strong..... you still haven't lost your kindness."

Live in the same world.

That means she's also living in the same world as Liezel.

A world where the words 'morals' and 'ethics' don't exist, where military corporations continuously conduct human experimentation daily.

A world where countries force teenage soldiers to put on 『Headphone Fuzz』s and compel them to enter labyrinths.

Furthermore, no Escape magic is loaded into those 『Headphone Fuzz』s.

If you lose, you die.

If you lose, you die.

If you lose, you die.

Thus, there is no other choice but to win. There is no other choice but to step on your comrades and win.

I have always been in such a place, and I could feel faintly that Kiri is also from that kind of world.

Different from Gunjou.

Different from Shiro.

Right from the beginning, she gave off the same smell of living in a dark, dirty world as me.

Her hand grip strengthens.

I look down at her and ask.

"I don't know where you got the impression from, but I'm not kind at all."

"Ah-haha."

"Rather than that, what did you mean by the same world? Where on earth did you live?"

Kiri answers.

"..... in a world where I dream about going on a date with a guy I like on Christmas."

In the end, she's still not being honest about it.

She won't speak the truth.

She must have undergone some really grievous training.

Thus,

"I've said this just now, but it's meaningless to talk to you....."

Kiri says sadly.

"Those are my true feelings though."

"I don't believe you. Neither is there a need to believe you."

"I know..... I know, but well ~"

Her grip on my hand becomes even stronger. With a troubled look, she presses it against her chest. Whether it is an act or not, I do not know. I also do not know why she would do such a thing. Does she want something from me?

Don't tell me she's really in love with me?

Kiri pouts her lips and says.

"..... you're so worried about Gunjou-san, but yet don't believe a thing I said, it's really unfair."

What is this woman saying?

"..... I'm..... not as cute as Gunjou-san I guess."

Kiri is cute. At the very least, her looks are way above average, I suppose. She also has a good figure, and large breasts. If the petite, flat-chested Gunjou were to hear that, she would explode in fury.

But Kiri will never say all that.

Because she is not adorable.

Because she is too strong. Because she has received the world's darkness. Because she smiles without saying a single word of truth.

Because she is able to abandon her comrades.

I sit on the chair. With her hand still grabbing mine, I say,

"Can you let go?"

But she looks at me mischievously,

"Don't wanna."

But, on hearing that, I brush her hand away.

"Oh my ~"

She smiles sadly again. That face of hers is certainly cute. But I don't get that cuteness of hers. Does she really like me? Or is she forcing a front and manipulating me?

I say.

"As I thought, there's nothing to talk to you about. I don't want to be manipulated."

"I'm not manipula....."

But, her words stop. As if she's troubled, her face contorts for an instant, but she breaks into a smile abruptly, and her lips pout again.

"..... mm ~, no, I mean. Sorry. Maybe, I'm manipulating you..... I have an ulterior motive of making you like me..... aah, what am I saying.... haah..... aaah....."

She sighs to herself and looks up at the ceiling. Drained.

Seems like she has own troubles to deal with, but it's none of my business.

She isn't telling me her true intention.

That goes the same for me.

In that case, there's no need for us to talk.

And at that moment, the door to the classroom finally opens.

"All right, I'm late. Let's begin our class ~!"

Our homeroom teacher Honjou Tsukasa walks in.

Carrying a stack of documents.

Behind her, there's another male teacher who's around thirty, and another female teacher around forty.

They are probably the homeroom teachers for class 3 and 4.

The male teacher says.

"All right, this time....."

But Honjou Tsukasa interrupts him.

"Who said you can take over somebody else's class? I'm the one in charge here so keep quiet."

"..... guh."

The male teacher goes silent.

The forty-year old female teacher starts while still remaining outside the classroom,

"..... erhm, can I go? Honjou-sensei, you are the one responsible for this class right?"

On hearing that, the female student who has a boyfriend in class 2 stands up and says.

"Sensei! Please don't say something irresponsible."

However, the female teacher stares coldly at the girl and says,

"Well, please do your best. Honjou-sensei is a capable teacher, so you should be fine."

And she leaves.

"Sensei!"

The girl hollers but Honjou Tsukasa seems unbothered. She places the documents on her desk and hits the blackboard with a hand.

"Now now, class is starting! The time limit is six hours. Let's quickly kill the girl and save the world!"

And thus, the lesson on the labyrinth.....

No, the lesson on Mizuiro Gunjou begins.

Chapter 4 - Mizuiro Gunjou

1:22 AM

The lesson starts.

The lesson starts.

The lesson about the girl who manifested the labyrinth disease starts.

She has no privacy nor human rights.

Since she has already been designated as a calamity.

As much as time allows, everything about her will be investigated.

『First Hour Period ---Please learn about the profile of the girl』

Name --- Mizuiro Gunjou.

Sixteen.

Girl.

Height 147 cm.

Weight 35 kg. As light as a feather.

Born in Minato, Tokyo city.

She is a descendant of the founder of Mitsutomo Group, one of the three big military conglomerates that have expanded rapidly since the discovery of the labyrinth disease. In other words, she's a super rich man's daughter.

Which reminds me, the 『Headphone Fuzz』 she was using was a 'Mitsutomo Heavy Industries Made' one. So that was the reason why she was using that headphone.

As a lady of the Mitsutomo Group, she had received gifted education since when she was still a child.

As for her family members ---

Mother - Mitsutomo Yurie.

Father - Mizuiro Seitarou.

Elder sister - Mizuiro Ruri.

Three people.

Her parents' teaching was that it would be meaningless if she didn't become a strong magician. As a member of the bloodline of Mitsutomo Group, which has grown thanks to the 『Magic Converted from Labyrinth Spoils』, she had to grow up as a talent who could save the world and be useful to the world.

Consequently, since she was a child, she had received strict instructions to not shame the Mitsutomo name.

But when Gunjou was eight, her big sister Ruri who was fifteen then died. Her big sister, who had already become a magician and started to make a name for herself, died in a failed labyrinth raid.

Even as Gunjou cried, shaken up, her parents did not cry. There was not even a funeral. If she could die in a labyrinth of that level, she's not our child, they scorned her.

Make sure you don't die in such an unsightly manner like her, they drilled into Gunjou.



Since then, Gunjou strove a notch harder in her training.

For the sake of saving the world.

For the sake of not becoming unsightly.

For the sake of getting praised by her parents.

And then, we had that Gunjou. That Mizuiro Gunjou who had become a world-famous magician with twenty corporate sponsors.

But yesterday.

On the 2nd of December.

She had a labyrinth disease onset.

That is the official data given to us.

Or I could say, something that Gunjou herself was already aware of.

However, there is some other data here. As she no longer has any privacy.

About her recent behavior.

About how she went to karaoke with friends recently and how she had fun there.

About how she became more tearful recently.

About how she got hyped up by her rivalry with her classmate Arisu Shinnosuke, and had been training longer hours than before.

"....."

But that doesn't matter.

More importantly,

Both she and her big sister were abandoned kids ---

They were orphans bought from a children's home by the Mitsutomo Group

Their parents were not even married, but just training instructors ---

Mitsutomo Group hid this truth from them to make use of them, and without knowing it, they tried desperately to please their 'parents'.

Reading about that environment which Gunjou was placed in unknowingly, in the end, it's the same everywhere, I thought and smiled.

Kiri looks at me sadly, and smiles.

Shiro's face has become a little angry, it seems. But maybe I am mistaken.

As if none of that matters, the lesson moves on.

About her recent behavior.

About her wonderful results.

About the large number of people she had saved.

About the fact that she actually likes flowers, and had made a flowerbed on the balcony of her room. And about how she disliked winter because flowers wilt then.

In the middle of the lesson, Shiro raises his hand.

"Sensei."

"Hn? What is it, Shiro."

"It's enough. I've read all the data."

"You are not allowed to read ahead on your own without....."

"That's for when we have a lot of people right? If there's a gap between the comprehension capabilities of the people, that might be a better way but....."

Shiro looks at us. At me, Kiri, Yousuke, and Himi. He didn't look at the other students.

"In the end, the guys who are gonna do it today are mostly those who know Gunjou well. There's no need for us to learn anything more about her profile. Let's leave more time for the raid and move on to the next lesson."

Honjou Tsukasa looks at us.

"Is everyone in agreement?"

There is no objection. Honjou Tsukasa nods.

"Then, let's take a toilet br....."

Before she finishes, our homeroom teacher stops. She then says.

"You don't need a break?"

No objection as before.

Honjou Tsukasa grins.

"Aren't you guys unusually serious? You guys are finer people than I thought. Do you want to save your classmate that badly?"

Even though she said 'save', but it's really to 'kill' --- no one replies to her question.

I look out the window.

The snow has started piling up in the schoolyard. Is it also cold inside the tower that Gunjou has given birth to?

Just like Gunjou, I too hate winter. It's because it's cold.

"....."

And thus, the first hour period ends.

『Second Hour Period ---Lesson on memorizing the structure of the labyrinth made by the girl』

The lesson in the second hour period, is to read and memorize the data of the labyrinth created by Gunjou, from the scans by the researchers.

No one knows why it is a tower.

There are 100 floors above ground; this is a tower that only extends upwards.

Additionally, the labyrinth is not a complicated one and there is only one straight path.

On each wide floor, there is only one place where the next floor is connected via a staircase.

The floor that Gunjou is on is the 75th floor.

If we insert into the labyrinth in the remaining hour, and if we start climbing all the way up from the ground floor, we won't make it if we take more than a minute to clear each floor.

And say, if we want to fight Gunjou with 20 minutes remaining, we have to reach Gunjou in 40 minutes, meaning we have to clear each floor in about 30 seconds or so and that's just impossible.

In that case,

"Are we inserting right into an upper level?"

I turn the page. The infiltration route starts indeed from above the ground floor. The possible points of insertion are, the 100th floor, and the 30th floor, it seems.

Even though both routes are provided in the documents, it's probably better to enter from the 100th floor. In that way, we have less floors to clear in our raid.

At that moment, Santou raises his hand.

"Erhm, Sensei, can I ask something?"

"What is it? Ah ~, you are..... who again?"

"Santou. Santou Taisuke."

"So, Taisuke-kun, what is it?"

"Which route should I memorize? Which route will we be taking....."

But, Yousuke says.

"We don't know what will happen, so it's better to memorize both."

I agree.

Gunjou is a high level labyrinth. Then, the instant we enter, we won't know what will happen and what kind of problems we will face; in the first place, we don't even know whether the labyrinth structure would be the same as the scans.

In that case, we should make as many preparations as possible.

"Memorize both..... both..... I see."

Santou looks a little surprised, and he nods.

Our homeroom teacher Honjou Tsukasa then says.

"Ah, by the way, class 5 will be inserting into the 100th floor."

Kiri looks up.

"Class 5? Which means there will be other raid teams?"

I then say with half-opened eyes.

"Probably the guys from Kansai."

Honjou Tsukasa did mention something like that over the phone. Since there was the fear of the possibility of the Tokyo students getting wiped out by Gunjou, they called in the students from Kansai ---

The team from Kansai will probably raid Gunjou at the same time.

Honjou Tsukasa nods.

"That's right. I heard they'll come. Though I doubt any of them will be stronger than our team..... But still, it seems like there's a capable team in Kansai; rivaling our 『Hero Team』 . they are dubbed the 『Valor Team』 ."

Never heard of them.

But Himi says.

"..... they are a team that has several corporate sponsors behind them, one that has become famously recently all of a sudden right? I heard they are really strong as a team."

I smile.

"Haha, they must have great teamwork, different from us who can't even get along huh?"

On hearing that, the female student with a boyfriend in class 2 says angrily.

"Then you guys should just get along!"

I look at her. How are we supposed to get along better than this?

Then, at that moment, I can hear the sound of choppers outside the window.

5 transport choppers. Seems like the whole Kansai group is coming.

They are probably deceived about the difficulty level.

I ask.

"Sensei."

"What is it, Shinnosuke-kun?"

"This is not in the documents yet, but what is the rank of the labyrinth this time?"

Honjou Tsukasa replies readily.

"It's 15."

As expected, she lied. If that's true, then there won't just be only 10 Kichijouji High students left here.

Even though 15 is not a low rank per se, it's possible to clear it with barely a few fatalities. And the reward for clearing it is huge. You can get correspondingly high rewards for clearing high level labyrinths. There will probably be a lot of people who wants to participate.

But all the students in this school did not think that the labyrinth born out of Gunjou would be of a low rank. That's why everyone's gone.

Shiro says.

"So, its actual rank?"

I answer.

"42."

A buzz sounds instantly in this classroom with no more than 10 people. Even Kiri, who's beside me, gave off a shiver.

Shiro looks at me.

"How did you know?"

"Sensei told me over the phone."

"So, you came despite knowing the rank?"

"You should also have a faint idea that it'd be something this right? The cowards have already gone home."

But Kiri says from beside me.

"..... 42, you say..... it's a number where it's not a question of cowards or not anymore."

At that moment, the girl with a boyfriend in class 2 stands up. She trembles uncontrollably. Her face is on the verge of tears. She then looks at us,

"..... uwu..... uwuuuuu..... uwuuuu."

She lets out some strange crying sounds, but without saying anything, she leaves the classroom.

She has abandoned her boyfriend.

The perilous love affair easily ended.

And that is the right choice.

"All right, one Escaped."

Two others stand up. And dash out of the classroom.

"Three Escaped."

I murmur.

Santou and another girl remain. Both of them have fearful faces.

Santou turn to face us.

"..... erhm, is the Hero Team..... not running away from a rank 42? Is there any chance of winning?"

Shiro appears thoughtful. A face that looks as if it's considering what the right choice is.

He then looks at me.

"Hey, Shinnosuke."

"Hn?"

"What is the highest ranked labyrinth you've cleared before?"

Kiri too looks at me with deep interest on her face.

But Honjou Tsukasa interrupts.

"Since the lessons on how to go about raiding it, and what kind of team to form, will take place in the 4th hour and 5th hour periods, can you guys wait until then before deciding on whether you are going to get blown away by the wind of cowardice?"

She's right. The time limit draws near while we are wearing ourselves out with this kind of talk.

"How's the map?"

Shiro then answers Honjou Tsukasa's words.

"Already done memorizing it."

Santou then frantically says.

"You're kidding me!?"

But no one looks at Santou. At any rate, his ability won't be of any use in a rank 42 labyrinth. It doesn't matter whether or not he has memorized the map.

Honjou Tsukasa says.

"Class 5 will insert on the 100th floor. However, from the survey, there will be more obstacles from there down, so we don't really know which insertion point is really better. And by telling you this, the 2nd hour period is over, and now....."

I look up at the clock.

The second hour period has ended at 2.15. No more than an hour has passed since the start of class.

Honjou Tsukasa says.

"Do you need a break?"

As before, no one makes a sound.

And I have already memorized the map.

I have already memorized everything there is to know about the way to where Gunjou is.

Now, the next lesson begins.

『Third Hour Period ---Lesson on the girl's weakness』

Gunjou's weakness is the blood of others.

From the results of the investigation, her movements will cease if she either sees or touches blood.

While it's not like she will be damaged by the blood itself, but it's possible to stop her movements.

"....."

She can't deal well with the sight of blood.

She can't deal well with seeing her comrades die.

She can't deal well with seeing others get hurt.

Is that the reason why she's weak against blood?

I don't know. It's not written in the documents. The only thing that's clear is that she's weak against blood.

Furthermore, with regards to how to get blood on her.

How to predict her movements.

Information covering a variety of patterns on these, as well as what abilities Gunjou possesses, are written; though I memorized them, I cannot rely on them. In actual fact, the labyrinth disease girl will move in more complicated manners than what is written in the documents. Because there will still be some emotions and intelligence left in them.

Gunjou's abilities are also more or less the same as what she had.

Depending on the labyrinth, her abilities will get boosted, but anyhow, it means that she will be using magic.

In other words, she will use a variety of magic ---

"..... how troublesome."

I think aloud.

She's now different from a normal human being, and can also use a broad range of fortifying magic. In that case, no matter how much you try to predict her movement patterns, it will never be exactly the same.

Honjou Tsukasa has prepared tens of measuring cylinders filled with red fluids on the teacher's desk and she says.

"The blood has been prepared, so take as many as you like. Get it on Gunjou, stop her, then kill her. Get it?"

With that, the 3rd hour period comes to an end.



10 minutes break ---

Right after we were dismissed, I headed out of the classroom to the toilet.

To the toilet at the level two floors above, where the AV and meeting rooms are at. It's the toilet which Gunjou often visited when she puked from her nervousness. This was where she desperately hid that self of hers which was crushed by the pressure from her commitment to protect her comrades.

"....."

I switch on the lights of the completely dark corridor.

No one is here as expected.

I stare at the ladies, but since Gunjou is no longer here, I enter the gents. Just as I am about to relieve myself at a urinal, Shiro enters the toilet.

Lining up right beside me.

I look at Shiro and say.

"There are three urinals so why are you standing beside me? Don't tell me you are gay?"

"Aren't you saying that because you are embarrassed at being looked at?"

"Shall I show it to you?"

On hearing that, Shiro grins,

"Oh my, you sure are confident. I'll take your challenge."

And, as he starts to turn towards me,

"Huh? Damn you, don't screw with me!"

I holler angrily and step back from the place. I have yet to open up my zipper.

At that moment, Yousuke enters.

"Helloz."

On top of that, Himi and Kiri enter as well.

While looking around, Kiri says,

"Wow, this is the first time I enter a gents ~"

I look at them in blank amazement.

"Why are all of you here?"

Kiri then answers.

"Isn't it because the Hero Team is having an emergency meeting?"

Shiro looks at me. As expected, Shiro's fly is also still closed. Well, that's a given.

Yousuke says.

"Ah, but Shinnosuke, if you can't hold it in, we can go out for a while....."

"Never mind that. It's not that full."

My arms crossed, I look at the assembled Hero Team in the cramped toilet.

Shiro says.

"Ah, anyway for now, can I speak in the role of the person in charge?"

No one objects, and he nods and continues.

"First, let's ascertain our situation. The rank of the labyrinth that Gunjou gave rise to is 42. Even in the world-level perspective, this is a rather high level labyrinth. If we let it become an eternal labyrinth, it will be at a rank of 420 or greater but --- now. Is this something we should raid, or not? Let me hear your opinions. Those who are in favor of entering it, raise your hand."

The way Shiro is seeking for hand raises with clear-cut words and not expecting any opinions, is the mark of someone who is not a follower, but one who has managed a great number of people before.

Despite pretending that he was opposing Gunjou, he really is someone who's used to leading people.

Those who are in favor of entering the labyrinth, raise your hand ---

However, no one raise his hand to those words.

Continuing, Shiro says.

"Then, those who are against entering it raise your hand."

Then..... Yousuke, Himi, and Kiri, raise their hands while looking at one another's faces.

That's natural. Because it's a rank 42.

Only fools will enter it.

Shiro looks at me.

"I'm also against it. And thus, we won't enter it this time."

"My."

"The people who won't be entering it includes you as well, Shinnosuke."

"Ha, you want me to just follow what everyone decided.....?"

Shiro then nods readily.

"That's right."

"Don't include me in your comrade group without asking me."

But Shiro looks hard at me,

"Even if you say that, this is a no-brainer choice for normal labyrinth raiding magicians right? However, if this were a rank 25, I believe we would be able to clear it if this team cooperates."

He said something incredible. Both Himi and Yousuke have looks of surprise on their faces, but Kiri says hesitatingly.

"Eh, eh, don't tell me this is turning into a development of us entering it? It's 42 you know?"

But, ignoring her, Shiro continues.

"Based on what I saw, the Asahi Momoka incident should be a rank 20 or so."

Based on what he saw, he said. In other words, this guy should have at least cleared a rank 20 before.

"And so, if this were a rank 20 labyrinth, this team would be able to clear it. I have never seen the likes of such an excellent group assembled before. If so, if we make our preparations carefully, I think we can even clear up to a rank 20 labyrinth. If Gunjou were at that level, then, well, we probably could do it. But the truth is....."

"42. It's impossible."

Says Kiri.

Shiro nods.

"I also think so. There is no fool who would raid a time-limited rank 42. But Shinnosuke. You came to the classroom despite knowing that it's rank 42. Does that mean you have a chance at winning?"

On hearing that question, I ponder.

Do I have a chance at winning?

Two years ago. When I was fifteen, I had raided a rank 40 eternal labyrinth. It has been two years since. Right now, my strength is of course

way higher than that time. The me right now should be able to clear it without appearing unsightly as I did then.

Perhaps, I might be able to raid a rank 55 eternal labyrinth.

But even so, I have no confidence in winning this time.

Only the ultimate fool will enter a rank 42 time-limited labyrinth that has not been fully surveyed. What on earth am I doing?

But Shiro asks me.

"So let me ask something about you. What is the highest rank you have raided?"

"....."

"What is giving you the confidence to be here?"

"....."

"Why are you so fixated in raiding it? Are you going after the reward that you will get just from entering it? Or, is there some other reason?"

"....."

Shiro stare at me and says.

"Tell us the reason behind your obsession in raiding this labyrinth. And, if you recognize us as comrades and ask for our help, we'll help you. But if you don't, meh."

"Meh? Are you a kid?"

On hearing my words, Shiro smiles.

"But that's obvious right. It's a rank 42 you know? Normally, no one will enter. The only choice is to Escape."

He's right.

But Shiro says.

"But you want to enter. Maybe you are way stronger than what I've imagined, and might be able to clear a rank 42 labyrinth by yourself."

That's impossible. Completely out of the question. Two years ago, a hundred men team entered, and I was the only one who barely survived.

Shiro continues.

"But from what I'd imagined, you can't do it alone. In that case, you need comrades. Comrades who you can trust. And this is where we come in."

At that moment, Shiro raises his fist. Fast. He is trying to punch me.

I stop that fist and say.

"You shouldn't be hitting comrades right?"

But Shiro looks hard at me and says.

"If we are comrades, that is. But, I haven't heard it from your mouth yet.
Are we comrades?"

"....."

"Do you need our trust?"

"....."

"Say it. If you want our help, then tell us you want us as your com....."

I thrust Shiro's hand away.

Shiro then glares at me and says.

"All right, I got it. You are not our comrade. Then, we won't be entering the labyrinth this time. I won't want to entrust my life to someone who's not our comrade and die."

"....."

"You can enter it alone and die by yourself. Or, maybe, it'd be fine for you to put up your solitary airs and achieve your grand ambition. At any rate, it's probably an ambition you can achieve by yourself, right?"

"....."

Shiro turns his back to me and says.

"Well, we're going home. We're Escaping first. Bye, Shinnosuke."

Yousuke looks as if he wants to say something but Shiro stops him.

As always, Himi looks up at me apologetically, but says nothing.

The three of them exit the toilet.

And with this, everything comes to an end.

Gunjou's fate comes to an end.

Gunjou is gone before we even enter the labyrinth.

Without Shiro and the rest, she can't be saved.

I can't clear a rank 42 labyrinth all by myself.

Then, it can be said that I am the one who has killed her.

Because I can't trust anyone.

Because I can't accept anyone as my comrade.

Because I am a chicken-hearted, wimpy coward, Gunjou dies.

I.....

"....."

Kiri touches my elbow gingerly from behind me,

"..... Shinnosuke-kun....."

She says.

"I think this is the correct thing."

"....."

"Even if we enter the labyrinth, it's not like we can save Gunjou-san's life."

No. It's possible to save her. I possess the magic to do that.

However, I am unable to accept the goodwill of others.

Because I'd get hurt if I trust and like someone and she dies.

Because I'm afraid of getting betrayed by someone I trust and like.

But, if I don't trust anyone, will I be able to save anyone hence forth?

Do I really think that I'll be getting to the point of being able to clear a rank 666 labyrinth all by myself?

At any rate, it's probably an ambition you can achieve by yourself, right?

Shiro said that.

I clench my fist.

"..... damn."

I moan.

Kiri's touch on my arm becomes heavier.

I ask.

"Kiri."

"Yeah."

"If I tell you that I'm entering Gunjou's labyrinth, will you follow me?"

"..... Shinnosuke-kun, you wouldn't do such a thing, would you?"

"If I tell you I would?"

"You wouldn't. You..... no, both you and I don't live in that kind of world."

"But, if I tell you I would?"

I ask.

On hearing that, Kiri ponders quietly for a while, and then says,

"..... then, I might just follow you....."

That's an unbelievably foolish response. An answer that I would not have expected from the smart and strong Kiri.

Without thinking, I say with a half-grin.

"..... you must be an idiot. It's 42 you know?"

"Yeah."

"Then why would you come?"

"..... because I like you, I suppose."

"Don't screw with me."

"Or it's because you have saved me before, perhaps? I don't really know. But if you are asking me for real, then I might go. If you truly need me, then I might turn my back on everything and go along with you. I can't just let you die by yourself."

I turn around towards Kiri.

With a worried face, she is looking straight at me.

A genuine face.

Even though there is nothing in it for her, she is worried about me dying, and said that she would enter the labyrinth with me.

A fool.

In the end, she's the same good girl like Gunjou.

Hating to see her comrades die. Unable to abandon friends. Falling in love with somebody, and willing to help that person without getting anything in return; that's the kind of world she resides in.

Shiro trusts me, and is willing to risk his life to enter a rank 42 labyrinth which he should not enter, if I ask for his help.

Kiri too is willing to risk her life to enter a rank 42 labyrinth if I ask.

A choice that a sane person would not make.

In other words, I am already someone who's trusted by them.

Trusting me unconditionally, in a pushy manner.

All that remains is for me to return that trust. For me to do my best in suppressing my fear, rub shoulders with them and trust them.

"..... damn, damn, damn."

There is no more time.

There is no more time to fret.

In the meantime, Gunjou's life is fading away.

"..... damn, it's your win."

I exit the toilet to go after Shiro. Shiro has never returned all along.

Standing outside the toilet with their backs against the wall, are Shiro, Himi, and Yousuke.

Shiro looks at me and grins.

I scowl and say.

"..... aren't you guys waiting for me?"

Shiro grins and says,

"Those aren't the words I want to hear. Let's go again."

"....."

"Now, there's no more time so say it quickly. Say that you want us to become your friends. Since you're a good guy anyway."

"....."

"You were the one who told us that it was rank 42. It was stated to be a rank 15 at the end of the documents. A lie was written. And so, if you had wanted to make use of us, you would have just ridden on that lie. There was no need to tell us that it was rank 42. But yet, you told us. Why? There are three reasons I can think of.

1. Because you're an idiot.
2. Because on top of telling us the truth, you wanted our help.
3. Because you like us.

Now, which is it?"

This guy's really annoying. I hate him. I don't want to talk to him. But, there isn't any more time. So I scowl, glare at Shiro, and say.

"..... it's number two."

"What's number two?"

"....., help me."

Shiro smiles.

Yousuke smiles.

Himi also smiles.

Kiri comes out of the toilet, looks a little happy, and a little troubled, then looks up at me.

This is the worst.

Really the worst.

However, even if it's the worst, I have to tell them if I want their trust. At any rate, there isn't any more time. Thus, I disclose the information that I shouldn't be leaking out..... to Shiro, Himi, Yousuke, and Kiri.

"..... I..... possess the magic that might allow me to forcibly sever the illness from Gunjou and save her."

Shiro's eyes widen very much in surprise.

More like, everyone has a surprised look.

Because no one has ever heard of the existence of such a magic. Since if a diseased girl could be killed, she would be terminated --- and no one would be bothered to seriously develop such a troublesome magic.

But, Shiro does not ask any question. He merely narrows his eyes, and looks hard at me.....

"Then, this is the only chance we have to save Gunjou. If she turns into an eternal labyrinth, it'd be impossible."

That's right.

A rank 420 is practically unclearable. Shiro takes a step forward, grabs my arm and says to me.

"All right, then let's do it. Let's enter the labyrinth and save Gunjou."

Save --- he actually said such an idiotic word that proclaims his willingness to risk his life to save another person so easily.

On top of that, both Himi and Yousuke place their hands on Shiro's hand which is grabbing me.

Further on top of that, Kiri too places her hand.

I no longer have any idea how to stop that.

I can only look down at them, troubled ---

Suddenly behind me, a girl's voice rings out.

"What the heck? Holding hands in the toilet? The peeps in Tokyo sure like to act all-friendly like little brats huh?"

I look in her direction.

Down the corridor, I see a group of people in school uniforms. Uniforms that are different from those of 『Kichijouji High』 .

They are probably the group from the school in Kansai.

In the center, a twin tailed girl with an abnormally short skirt is staring at us, smirking.

Though both her appearance and voice are cute, murderous intent overflows from her entire body. She has already activated her 『Headphone Fuzz』 .

She's probably quite strong.

They are probably the people who are dubbed as the 『Valor Team』 . I count a total of nine people.

Shiro, Kiri, Himi, Yousuke, and I look in their direction.

The Kansai girl says.

"When I heard of the Hero Team, I thought they would be a bunch of tough-looking guys and came here feeling a little apprehensive, but what the heck, they're just a bunch of blockheads. What do you think? Zakkii?"

Then, the small-looking guy called Zakkii, with swept-back hair, steps out.

"Indeed, they look weak. Shall we test them before entering the labyrinth?"

"I wonder whether it's a crime to kill them outside of the labyrinth in Tokyo?"

"It can't be helped if weaklings die right?"

"Yeah. Then --- Incineration switch."

She invokes her magic suddenly.

Threatening to fill up the narrow corridor, flames burst out of the girl's raised palms.

But the guys behind me have also activated their magic.

Yousuke steps out. Spreads his hands.

"Spider Legs switch!"

He uses an AOE defense magic.

From the center of both his hands, eight spider-like legs spread out, and threads start dancing out, creating a barrier of threads in front of Yousuke.

The threads burn.

The spider burns.

But that's where the flames stop.

However, from the other side of the corridor, a voice rings out. It's the voice of the guy called Zakkii.

"Slashing Maiden switch."

A flash of light.

Then a slash.

A powerful attack that an AOE defense magic can't defend against.

However, Kiri steps out.

"Nine-Fold switch."

A Japanese sword appears in her hand. With the magic from that sword, she can counter nine attacks of any power.

Swinging her sword, she receives the slash from Zakkii.

Zakkii is holding a dirk-like object in a reverse-hand grip.

"Oh my, you can stop this. Who are you?"

"A comrade of the Hero Team."

Comrade.

Comrade.

Comrade.

Shiro looks at me.

Then,

"Comrade."

He slaps my shoulder delightedly, to which I scowl.

"You should fight too."

"My magic has too much destructive power and shouldn't be used inside the school right? You do it."

"..... tch, firepower idiot."

While clicking my tongue, I step forward.

Then, the girl behind Zakkii, who is exchanging slashes with Kiri, jumps out.

"While you're talking, this is the end ~! Burning Bullet switch!"

She twists her body.

Her fist alit.

At the same time, I activate the magic that has been flowing in my brain.

【In an instant ♪ In a flash ♪ In the time of a flash ♪

The flash of time, the flash of an instant ♪ In an instant ♪ In a flash
——】

"..... Acceleration switch ---"

I accelerate my body. I kick the floor, kick the wall, and encircle the girl from behind.

The girl reacts. She's following my movements. Maybe those flames are bestowing a speed-boost to her body.

However, even so,

"I'm faster."

I grab her twin tails.

"Ouch, it hurts."

She swings her fist at me but it doesn't reach me. I fling her with all my might. She tumbles over the corridor.

Zakkii retreats from us and yells.

"Makoto!"

Seems like her name is Makoto. She immediately gets back up. And glares at us.

"Not bad. I let my guard down a little, next time....."

But, a graceful looking girl, with long deep blue hair, and clear eyes that are also deep blue in color, steps out, and stops her.

"Let's stop, Makoto. This is not the time for a brawl between Kantou and Kansai, is it?"

Then, Makoto's movements stop. Seems like the deep blue girl is the leader. She looks at us with quiet eyes.

"..... you are the 『Hero Team』 members right? We are from 『Osaka Arts High』 ."

Shiro then says.

"You are the rumored 『Valor Team』 huh?"

"We've been recently called that. It's a name given to us in school. And, are you the leader of the 『Hero Team』 ?"

The deep blue girl looks at Shiro.

"Hn?"

Shiro then looked in my direction. Will you be the leader, his eyes speak.

I wave my hand in an irritated manner, and beckon him to quickly get things going.

Shiro then goes on to look at Kiri, but she shakes both her head and hands to reject the post.

If Gunjou were here, we might be disputing about it, but right now, the leader of the 『Hero Team』 is decided easily.

Shiro turns to his front and says.

"I'm the leader, Hishiro Shiro."

The deep blue girl then nods her head and says.

"I am Mitsutomo Kujaku."

Mitsutomo --- that's the name the girl gave.

She carries the same family name as Gunjou, the name of the military conglomerate, Mitsutomo group, that had brought up Gunjou.

I look hard at Kujaku and say.

"..... are you here to dispose of the shame of your family?"

Kujaku then looks at me. Then smiles.

"I'll be sorry if capable individuals were to be killed by that 『Shame』 , so I came here to do a little test. It seems like you are stronger than I expected but..... you're too few in numbers. You can't do anything with just five people right? How about leaving everything to us, 『Osaka Arts High』 and Escape now?"

I say.

"Are you saying you'll save the world?"

"Yes."

"It's rank 42 you know?"

"We know that of course. She's one of us after all. But rest assured. We'll dispose of this labyrinth and save Kantou, so the capable individuals of Tokyo can feel free to take a break from this. Well then, shall we go? Makoto, Yamazaki. Let's get rid of Mizuiro Gunjou."

Then, Kujaku turns her back to us.

The students from Kansai leave.

Shiro looks intently at the 『Valor Team』 and says.

"..... seems like those guys can take care of a rank 42."

"Yeah."

"Then, if they're doing it, the world can be saved."

"Maybe yeah."

"And, Gunjou will be disposed. Even if there's a way to save her, they'd still kill her probably. They've come here to get rid of a disgrace. It's a squad meant to dispose of Gunjou. They are probably backed by a military corporation."

But at that moment, Shiro puts a stop to those words and says something unpleasant happily,

"But even so, since you are a good kid, you'll risk your life for a comrade right?"

I don't want to reply. I'll definitely not answer that disgusting, dumb question of his.

And, while making a scowl that can't get any worse, I still say,

"Yeah, that's right. Before those trash who are dubbed the 『Valor Team』 , we'll reach the diseased girl and --- save Gunjou."

Chapter 5 - The Heart to Trust Comrades and Hope

『Fourth Hour Period ---Lesson on selecting the magic to kill the girl』

When we return to the classroom, our homeroom teacher, Honjou Tsukasa isn't there.

On the blackboard in large letters.

『Self-Study! When you are ready to infiltrate the labyrinth, we'll deploy the choppers, so call me then!』

Is written.

Well, indeed, during the fourth and fifth periods, the students will discuss among themselves the tactics for raiding the labyrinth and there probably isn't a need for the homeroom teacher to be there.

Right now, inside the classroom, the self-proclaimed top of class 3, Santou Taisuke, and a girl I don't know are seated.

Santou turns in our direction.

"Ah, you're finally back. Where did you guys go?"

I ignore him and enter the classroom. And sit at my seat.

Kiri again sits beside me.

Himi and Yousuke remain standing.

And Shiro then stands in front of the blackboard --- on the platform, and says.

"Then let's begin the fourth hour period, shall we? I'm your commander, Hishiro Shiro."

He looks at me, Kiri, Yousuke and Himi, then continues.

"Well, the fellows from the Hero Team already know me. So, as for the two new people..... one of you is Santou Taisuke right?"

Santou then stands up.

"Yeah. Top of class 3."

"Your grades don't matter. And, the other person....."

He turns his eyes to the brown-haired girl who has been keeping quiet all this while.

The girl looks up. Looks at Shiro.

"Kamiuchi Miko."

She gives her name.

Shiro then asks.

"So, which class's top are you?"

The girl called Miko answers.

"I'm not the top or anything..... I'm actually at the bottom of class 4."

"Hm. Why is someone like you here?"

"I have my reasons."

"What kind of reasons?"

Miko then shrugs her shoulders.

"It's not like I caught the labyrinth disease or anything, so I don't really feel the need to divulge my personal information."

Shiro then nods and says.

"You're right about that. But I did a small check. And there isn't anyone named Kamiuchi Miko in class 4."

"Oh, is that so? That's troubling."



"Not really. In the first place, we won't trust a person we just met. And, right now, you are going to activate your 《Headphone Fuzz》 but it'd be futile.

My comrades who are right behind you have already activated magic that will crush you."

Yousuke and Himi look down at Miko as they remain standing.

"....."

A murderous intent swells up from the body of Miko.

However, it doesn't seem like she's going to fight Shiro, Himi and Yousuke.

Shiro says.

"Let me ask you again. Who are you?"

Miko says.

"And if I don't tell you?"

"We'll kill you."

Miko stands up smiling.

"Meh, you guys are sure nosy."

She lapses into Kansai dialect. Miko then jumps. Fast. Towards Shiro.

Miko thrusts her palms out and hollers.

"Bomb Curtain switch."

The space before her hands warp. Compresses. Expands, about to explode.

"Shiro!"

Yousuke yells but Shiro smiles in delight.

"Penitence Severance switch."

He murmurs.

His magic activates.

An abnormally gigantic knife that normal people can never possibly swing appears in his hand that has been raised in advance.

Before that knife, the magic conjured by Miko explodes.

But the force from that explosion is unable to penetrate that bulky knife.

Shiro jumps. And grabs that hand of Miko from which the explosion arose. He twists it vigorously and press it against her face. And further goes on to bring her down to the floor.

"Well, try making that explosion again."

"Guh....."

Miko tries to raise her other free hand, but Shiro steps on it down with his foot.

But even with that, Miko's mouth opens,

"..... Self-explode swi....."

Shiro forcibly stuffs her mouth with her fingers. Preventing her from saying the trigger code.

"Guh guh guh."

Miko can no longer use her magic.

As expected, Shiro is strong. Overwhelmingly strong. He was able to invoke that gigantic specialized offensive magic, which is difficult to wield, in this cramped classroom, and without causing any damage to the classroom, render a relatively skilled opponent helpless.

Shiro turns towards us.

"Just now, she wanted to say Self-explode switch, but is that really a self-exploding magic, I wonder?"

I shake my head.

"No. I know that magic. It should be a magic brought back from the 'Magnetic Bomb 8' labyrinth. It's something that causes explosions to erupt from her entire body indiscriminately."

"I see. Then it's not like she was trying to risk her life and kill us all..... so, who are you? Though since you lapsed into Kansai dialect halfway, I already have a rough idea."

"..... fuh-guh-guh-guh."

"Oh well, you can't answer with a hand stuffed in your mouth."

Shiro then takes off her 《Headphone Fuzz》 from her ear. With that, even if he liberates her mouth, she won't be able to use magic.

"Hoih."

He throws the headphone behind him. I catch it.

It's a Mitsutomo heavy industries made 《Headphone Fuzz》 .

Mitsutomo group again.

I look down at it with half-opened eyes,

"..... probably a comrade of that 『Valor Team』 from earlier."

Shiro nods. He pulls out the fingers from Miko's mouth, stands up and says.

"Did you come to hinder us?"

Miko glares up at Shiro and says.

"Return my headphone."

"You heard her. Shinnosuke."

I throw up the headphone. Following that,

"Demon Sword switch."

I murmur. while holding a knife in my hand. From the center of the knife, a sword with the color of darkness starts extending. This magic will confer its magic to any object touched, and transform it into a demon sword.

The power that would be conferred is dependent on the nature of the object that is touched, and has an infinite variety. One would not know what kind of power it is unless one tries it. That is why this is a magic that is extremely difficult to use but, because it is possible to invoke all its different powers by changing the target object each time, if one has the time to test this general purpose magic, it could possibly make up for the limitation of having only six slots of magic.

And right now, the power of the demon sword I'm using ---

"..... Assassination property."

A power that allows the user to find the point where one can deal a fatal blow to the opponent with the strength of this sword,

A red target point appears before my eyes. The point finds the easiest place to break on the Mitsutomo heavy industries made 《Headphone Fuzz》 . The reason why I am doing this explicitly is because I fear that many of the members of the 『Valor Team』 would be wearing Mitsutomo heavy industries made 《Headphone Fuzz》 .

In that case, it's better to find its weak point first.

After looking at it, I swing my demon sword.

The 《Headphone Fuzz》 breaks.

However, I do not dispel my magic. The target circle has continued to find the point of destruction on another 《Headphone Fuzz》 .

The guy called Santou Taisuke from class 3.

The outward appearance of his 《Headphone Fuzz》 does not resemble that of Mitsutomo heavy industries made one but for some reason, it has the exact same weak point ---

"..... you too huh."

On hearing that, Santou turns around.

"Oh my, how did I get found out....."

Seems like this is the real spy. He probably intended to remain among us, but he got found out.

Santou says.

"Well, it's fine. We've completed our mission anyway. Let's go Miko."

He lapses into Kansai dialect. Together with Miko, they run towards the window. Break through the window outside.

We don't chase after them. There is no time, nor need to.

However, while turning around, Santou says.

"Ah, in the meantime, let me undo the magic ~. Time Difference Befuddling switch, release ~"

Instantly, the atmosphere in the classroom becomes lighter. It seems like a magic has been placed on the classroom --- no the entire school premises.

A trap magic.

And, the moment that magic has been undone, an unbelievable thing occurs.

The hands of the clock hanging on the wall of the classroom starts advancing quickly.

No, not just the clock hanging on the wall. Even the numbers displayed inside my mind from my 《Headphone Fuzz》 starts advancing rapidly.

Just a moment ago, the time remaining before Gunjou turns into an eternal labyrinth was 200 minutes, but --- right now, that time rapidly decreases.

The number of minutes remaining has dropped to 77 at one go.

I don't know what has happened. However, that Santou Taisuke has probably continuously activated that magic called Time Difference Befuddling switch of unknown origins while he was in the classroom.

It seemed like it was a magic that messed up the hands of the clock and the sense of time.

"..... they got us."

I groan.

That was the worst kind of traps.

It was probably to buy time for the Kansai team to acquire the knowledge on the labyrinth since they arrived.

Several engines resound from the outside.

The few Kansai choppers parked in the schoolyard start moving. Both Santou and Miko board one of the choppers.

They are planning to go kill Gunjou.

And we have yet to decide on our magic slot composition and team make-up.

Our homeroom teacher Honjou Tsukasa dashes into the classroom.

"What are you guys doing! The guys from Kansai are already departing!"

After the Time Difference Befuddling switch was undone, our homeroom teacher also had her sense of time restored all of a sudden.

Shiro looks at me. Then,

"..... all right. Even though it took a while, we managed to purge all the pus before entering the labyrinth. And, well, our composition isn't going to change much I suppose. Since we are left with the usual group."

Indeed, it's kinda funny that no one else is left.

Shiro continues.

"This team has already raided a number of labyrinths together. Do we still need to spend time hammering things out?"

On hearing that, Yousuke raises his hand.

"Hn ~, before we set off, can I say something?"

"Go ahead, Yousuke."

"..... all this while, there is a formation that we should have been using but yet had never used before. Though everyone is strong, it's a pity that we never got along and never could properly cover for one another."

Shiro smiles and nods.

"Especially the brats Gunjou and Shinnosuke really suck at teamwork....."

"Yeah yeah. But, since Shinnosuke has finally grown up....."

Unable to stand their irritating chatter anymore, I cut them off and say.

"Ah ah I got it, I got what you're trying to say, so let's hit it. We have no more time right? Let's do our strategy meeting inside the chopper on our way there."

Every one nods in acquiescence.

Most importantly, we can't be discussing our true plan in front of our homeroom teacher.

Because the knowledge of my possession of a magic that can be used to sever the labyrinth disease from a diseased girl must never be leaked out.

At that moment, Honjou Tsukasa says.

"Then I'll immediately deploy the chopper."

On hearing that, we exchange looks with one another and nod simultaneously.



A thunderous roar resound.

The sound of a chopper ascending into the sky.

At an altitude of 1200 meters.

We are about to insert into the abnormally gigantic blue tower born out of Gunjou from the 100th floor.

The noise of the military transport chopper is deafening.

Since only us, the Hero Team, and our homeroom teacher Honjou Tsukasa are in it.

But yet, for some reason, the seats around me are all jam-packed with people.

In front me is Himi.

Diagonally in front Yousuke.

With Shiro beside him.

Topping that off, Kiri is on my right, beside me.

"..... why, is everyone clustering together?"

Kiri then smiles.

"Because I want to be with you."

"I don't want that."

"And we have to come up with a strategy."

But that was done as soon as we boarded the chopper. Since there aren't a lot of strategies available to a team of only five people.

There are 6 available slots to load magic in a 《Headphone Fuzz》 for each person, and that amounts to just 30 slots for 5 people.

Furthermore, one of these slots is taken up by the Holy Sword switch for the purpose of saving Gunjou.

With that, we have 29 slots left.

Himi is on all support.

Yousuke on all defense.

Kiri is on a balanced configuration that places more emphasis on defense.

I am on a balanced configuration that places more emphasis on offense.

Shiro is on all specialized offense.

Our choices to employ the most effective strategy from this composition are limited. But well, the less choices we have the better.

Since we have no time. We are really too short on time. Thanks to Santou Taisuke's trap, we have lost a lot of time.

25 floors separate us from Gunjou.

And right now, we have 71 minutes remaining.

Even with the remaining 70 minutes for the raid, and if we were to leave 20 minutes to fight Gunjou, we have to clear each floor in 2 minutes.

One floor in 2 minutes.

Only 2 minutes.

2 minutes to clear a floor of a rank 42 labyrinth --- it's like a ridiculous joke in fantasy story.

But we have to do it.

Snap, snap, snap, I snapped my fingers slowly, slowly, at a speed that's not fast enough to activate the 《Headphone Fuzz》 .

In order to stabilize my brain waves, in order to calm my beating heart, in order to erase the small vibrations of the chopper, I snap my fingers.

Honjou Tsukasa says.

"Everyone, activate your headphones. We've reached the insertion point."

We are at an altitude of 1200 meters. That, per se, is already out of the ordinary. Even with the current advancements in science, there is no technology with which a 1200 meter tall building can be constructed.

The rear hatchway of the chopper starts opening slowly.

A sudden gust of wind, and thunderous roar.

Totally dark night.

The blue tower stands, as if it were sundering the darkness of the night.

Right now, the chopper is at a point that is 1200 meters high --- which is supposed to be where the 100th floor is at but, the tower continues to extend upwards to the sky.

The tip of the spire can't be seen at all.

Shiro looks up at that tower created by his comrade.

Himi looks up at the tower.

Yousuke looks up at the tower.

Kiri looks up at it, and squeezes my arm.

But,

"....."

I turn my eyes not to the tower but further down --- to the lands beyond. In the direction of another labyrinth that seems to line up side by side with Gunjou.

My little sister Saki's labyrinth.

Both Gunjou's tower and Saki's labyrinth are almost like they just next to each other. Even from this distance, I can see that they seem to be lined up perfectly side by side without overlapping into each other's turfs.

Honjou Tsukasa says.

"Now ~, it's finally time to kill the girl! It'd be fine! If you deal with it coolly, it'd be a walk in the park for you!"

There's no way it'd be fine right? It's rank 42 after all. But the words just now are the same as what Honjou Tsukasa says each time, as if they are standard lines memorized by heart, perhaps.

"Well, let's do a final check. Prepare your 《Headphone Fuzz》 for insertion. And also, don't forget your armband."

The armband refers to a tool that will allow one to ascertain the number of classmates remaining in the labyrinth.

I look at the armband with 『Class 5』 written on it, worn on my arm. On it are 5 red ☆ marks. By the way, when a full class of 20 are raiding the labyrinth, there will be 20 ☆ marks but, right now, 15 of them have already disappeared.

Honjou Tsukasa continues.

"I've always said this, but when 4 stars are gone, it'd be impossible to kill the girl so give up on the raid and Esca..... bufuhfuh."

She breaks out into laughter halfway.

Since, even though she said 'when 4 stars are gone', there are only 5 of them to begin with.

Looking around the roaring chopper, Honjou Tsukasa says in delight.

"Well, do your best."

I wave my fingers. I activate a song that has been loaded as a fundamental software different from the slots inside the 《Headphone Fuzz》 .

It's the intrusion magic.

The remaining time limit is 68 minutes.

We no longer have 2 minutes to clear each floor.

"Well, we'll be at the insertion point in another 30 seconds. Prepare yourselves ~. And, our class will win this time again. Don't let the other classes..... the guys from Kansai get the credit."

Shiro stands up and looks at me.

"All right. Let's get going. There's only one thing you must promise. Don't die. Don't get hurt. Escape when things get rough. Ok?"

Everyone nods.

Following that, Himi says.

"Once we enter, I will use the Picnic switch, and search for the shortest route not found on the map. Then I'll employ trap detection magic. When that happens, I have to close my eyes so....."

I cut her off.

"The same routine right? Shiro will be the one dragging Himi along. And everyone will protect you guys. Let's do it. Is there anything else?"

Shiro then says.

"No, none. And let's win, come back, and go to karaoke together."

"No thanks to that."

"Even though you're really thinking, 'it's great to have friends'."

"No way."

"Let's have fun together."

"....."

At that moment, Honjou Tsukasa says.

"It's time."

Then,

"Dive switch."

He says the trigger code for the purpose of activating the intrusion cursed song.

Instantly, Shiro's body is transported into the labyrinth and he disappears.

Following that, both Himi and Yousuke say.

"Dive switch."

"Dive switch."

Finally, Kiri looks at me,

"..... hey, Shinnosuke-kun. Are you really going?"

She asks and I turn to her and reply.

"Of course I won't be going to the karaoke."

"Haha....."

"Then, see you in the labyrinth. Dive switch."

Instantly, my body disassembles, and gets transported into the labyrinth.



I enter the labyrinth.

I enter the inside of Gunjou.

My cells that were disassembled by magic are reassembled.

"....."

Zuhkihn, Zuhkihn, a pain assaults my head numerous times. The pain from the backlash assaults my brain which is awash with the cursed song.

My eyeballs regenerate, and colors enter my dark vision.

White light.

Red light.

Blue, yellow, green, black.

My headache is gone.

My consciousness clears up.

I can see my surroundings.

Right now, I am inside the labyrinth created by Gunjou.

Gunjou's labyrinth is a world filled with vibrant blue.

The ceiling is so high that you can't see the end.

The wall is filled with paintings of the sky, clouds, oceans, and horizon. No, I'm not sure whether we can call those paintings. Because those paintings are moving like a movie. Because they are moving inside the wall.

But they aren't real paintings.

Like a picture book, an oil painting, the scenery of sky, clouds, and ocean slowly, gently, flows.

Occasionally, migratory birds fly in that wall painting.

Water splashes, forming a faint rainbow.

From afar, the roar of the ocean waves can be heard.

I look intently at that and think.

"....."

Maybe Gunjou really loves such tranquil things.

Or, maybe she's strongly attracted to the peaceful, ordinary, safe, tranquil world.

Or at the very least, she can't deal well with a world where she has to desperately risk her life to kill girls.

I thought. And I feel a slight pain in my chest. Is it because I felt a touch of concern for the Gunjou who has manifested the disease? Or, is it because I realize that a part of me also yearns for that tranquillity?

Well, anyone would have those kind of feelings.

"....."

I look in the direction of my comrade who has already started using her magic.

While moving her fingers, fuh fuh fuh, Himi blows out gently.

The magic she's using is a difficult one. A complicated magic that only someone who excels in support magic can employ.

Because what she's using is a powerful magic that can bring just a little change to both the fates of the labyrinth diseased girls and humans.

"..... Picnic switch."

Himi murmurs.

She murmurs the trigger code to activate her magic.

A magic code appears before Himi's eyes and she perceives the world through it. Different from her usual timid self, a look delight appears on her face,

"Ah, ah, now now ~ which place is more fun?"

She says.

She looks around her with a terribly delighted face.

This is a route-finding magic which allows her to find a detour en route to her destination and that detour will turn out to be a better route.

"It's better if it's more fun."

Even her tone of voice is different.

Probably the effect of the magic.

"Not yet ~, it'd be nice if it's even much more fun ~"

I then say.

"Not done yet?"

Yousuke then raises his hand in an attempt to silence me.

"Be quiet. Himi is expanding her search to increase the number of routes."

I look at Yousuke.

Yousuke continues.

"Himi must have judged that the first route won't let us reach Gunjou within the time limit, so she has boosted the magic and is doing another search."

Himi seems to be staring at some misdirected way and says with a smiling face.

"Ah-ha ~, no no, we want to..... adventure even more ♪."

Her eyes are bloodshot. Blood flows from her right nostril.

Shiro says.

"Himi, that's enough. We'll take that route. If you go on further, your brain will....."

"Not yet ♪ that's just too boring. I really love something more amazing, so ~ ♪"

Then, at that moment, something large jumps out of the ocean from the wall.

A shark.

A shark with a long sharp horn.

The shark jumps out of the wall onto the floor. Splash, the blue floor undulates. Seems like that shark is able to swim across the floor.

And it's terribly fast.

I count.

One.

Two.

Four.

Eight.

Eighteen.

"..... damn, that's a crazy number of them."

I let my fingers dance. I choose my song and activate my magic. Melody flows in my head. A cursed song flows.

【Sliced, shredded light ♪

Shredded, ripped-up light ♪

Abnormal, ruthless, extraordinary light ———】

"Demon Sword switch ---"

I hold a blade of darkness and ready my Demon Sword.

Following that, I immediately activate its power.

"Assassination property."

A target point appears before my eyes, searching for the sharks' weakness. I search for the place where I can kill a shark in one swing of my sword.

The weak point is their stomach.

Other than their backs, the sharks's bodies are submerged into the floor as they swim.

In other words,

"..... crap, can't pierce their weak point."

I scowl with a troubled face, to which Kiri asks.

"Where's the weak point?"

"Their stomach."

"Uweh, that puts us in a fix huh?"

"Very much."

Then, from behind us,

"Stomach huh? All right. Then, I'll use a magic that will create a large opening and I'll leave you to deliver the killing blow."

Shiro jumps.

And activates his magic.

"Fate Reversal Hammer switch!"

What an exaggerated name, but I suppose it's a magic that would probably conjure a hammer.

He raises both hands.

And with that, he swings down.

"Dohn!"

He verbalizes it.

Instantly!

Right before Shiro's eyes, an abnormally gigantic mallet with a sharp tip appears. It slowly, slowly, swings down. It's so slow that one of the sharks is on the verge of attacking Shiro.

"Jeez, Acceleration switch."

Activating both Demon Sword and Acceleration switches side by side, I jump. I thrust my sword into the stomach of the shark which is assaulting Shiro.

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah."

The shark howls and is annihilated.

Its stomach is its weak point as expected.

At the same time, Shiro's mallet strikes the floor on which the sharks are swimming.

Then,

"....."

Nothing happens. But, the mallet melts into the floor and disappears.

"What the hell is that magic!"

But Shiro says.

"Fate reversal!"

In that instant, goh goh goh goh, from underneath the floor, the hammer returns as it pierces the floor back and it jumps out with a dohn.

At the same time, all the sharks are thrown up into the air.

"Do it Shinnosuke!"

"No, you should have explained things..... aah whatever, I'll do it."

I jump. Swing my sword.

I cut the stomachs of the upturned sharks; cut, cut, cut, cut, cut.

Including the one that had assaulted Shiro, I've killed a total of seven. The remaining eleven look at me. My body's acceleration ends.

An assemblage of horns threaten to pierce me all at once. I gauge the time for reactivating my Acceleration switch.

I listen to the song.

I listen to the song.

The cursed song fills my brain.

Before I reactivate my magic, the horn of one of them reaches me.

"Assassination property!"

With the 『Assassination property』 of my Demon Sword switch, I search for the weak point of that horn where I shall receive the attack. Found it. I receive the attack at that angle.

Giihnn, the high-pitched sound of metal striking metal reverberates. I barely parry the horn, but also receive an outrageous amount of impact.

If I hadn't searched for the weak point with the assassination property and had received the attack just like that with my sword, my arm would have been broken and I would have probably been impaled.

"..... guh, hurry up..... get the curse filled up."

Another three come at me.

"Assassination property!"

I yell again. I search for the place where I can receive the attack from the three horns. Found them. Small. If I can get my sword in there, that's where I can receive the attack.

However, there is only just one point. If I make a mistake, my sword will get flung away and death will visit me readily. That's how strong the sharks brought forth by Gunjou are.

I look at those horns.

I look hard at the point of intersection of those three horns which only happens for an instant and strike my sword upwards.

Then, the horns strike against one another and stop. I slip through them.

Then at that moment,

"All right, my curse's filled up! Acceleration swi---"

But, that is the end of my words.

The migratory birds that had been flying in the wall suddenly fly out. Looking down at me. They start to spin like a drill. The drill descends as if it were lightning.

I have to dodge that.

I have to dodge those birds with my Acceleration switch.

"....."

I react, but it's fatal mistake.

Just a moment of hesitation, indecision, hard-headedness will turn everything to naught.

That's the kind of place a labyrinth is.

One of the sharks that had been submerged which I was unaware of jumps out. About to impale me.

I raise my sword to block that. Of course I can't do that effectively. I'm in mid-air. If I am in mid-air, I can't jump to the side.

Then, the migratory birds descend. I can't dodge that.

I really can't raid this labyrinth all by myself.

So,

"Damn, Yousuke!"

I holler.

Yousuke then answers.

"Which way?"

"Bring me close to the shark!"

"Reverse Force switch!"

Yousuke bellows. My feet are then pulled by a strong force. Pulled by a virtual force conjured by Yousuke. My foot lands on the head of the shark.

As I got my foothold,

"Acceleration ..."

At that moment, Kiri says. While swinging her Japanese sword at the horn of the shark that I am standing on,

"I will stop all the sharks, so get the birds!"

I look up at the sky.

Widen my eyes.

My eyeballs shake.

Moving back and forth.

Searching for their weak points, my target point capture the birds one after another ---

"Switch!"

Instantly, my body accelerates.

One instant, one second, one moment.

My speed surpasses even that of god.

My body zips past 6 migratory birds. By the time I zipped past, their lives were already gone.

I look down.

11 sharks are assaulting Kiri at the same time, but with just one sword,

"Ooof!"

She blocks against the horns. She cancels away all the impact in an instant. It's that kind of magic. Bracing herself, she raises her sword. The stomachs of the sharks appear from the floor.

And ---



"Penitence Severance switch."

Running from behind Kiri, Shiro attacks with his magic.

Shiro is dragging a large knife in his hand. He raises his long bulky knife that a normal human being can't lift.

"Cut them aaaaaaaallllllllll!!!"

That knife splits apart the stomachs of 8 of the sharks. And with that, those sharks die.

The remaining 3 sharks then quickly turn their dorsal areas toward us, hiding their weak points. Their backs are hard. At the very least, a fast fragile knife like mine that has a special characteristic won't be able to go through them.

However, the knife cuts into their backs, and pull away from the floor.

The sharks take damage, and roll onto the floor. Jumping from the floor.

By that time, I have already landed. My acceleration has yet to end. I kick the floor and jump. Swinging my demon sword. And split the stomachs of the 3 unsightly, flapping sharks one after another.

At that moment, my acceleration ends.

"..... zeeh, haah."

I restart my halted breathing, letting go of my held breath, then breathing in.

I then turn around.

Looking at Shiro and the rest.

Even though we have annihilated the sharks, we have yet to move from the entrance.

Even though we won't make it if we don't clear a floor in 2 minutes, already 4~5 minutes have gone by.

If Himi can't find the shortcut route, then it's time to Escape.

However, Himi raises both hands and says.

"Found it ♪."

Perhaps, as a result of her forcing herself unreasonably, a trickle of blood can be seen from her mouth. Her knees buckle to the floor.

"Himi!"

Yousuke helps her up. Himi makes a weak but somewhat pleased smile,

"I, I did it..... I found it!! Five floors below here, there's an elevator!"

I ask.

"How much time will that save us?"

But Himi does not answer. While standing up unsteadily, she closes her eyes. And then waves her fingers,

"Overprotective switch."

She murmurs.

Then, before her, an eyeball as large as a rugby ball appears, floating in the air. Looking around its surroundings.

It's a trap sensing magic. In other words, she has yet to give up.

With her eyes closed, Himi says.

"This floor probably has no hidden traps. Please run!"

Yousuke grabs Himi's hand,

"Let's go!"

And starts running.

I also start running.

I have already memorized the map. The route is completely imprinted into my mind. If we run at full speed, we should reach the descending staircase in 15 seconds.

Provided if there are no hindrances.

The wall has a peaceful scenery drawn on it as before.

Rainbow.

Sky.

Clouds.

Sea.

Gentle waves on the sea.

The beautiful melody of the roar of waves.

Then, from the other side of the sea, several sharks start popping out, swimming.

"The stairs! Let's go down! Ignore the sharks!"

Shiro yells.

With that, we descend the stairs.



95th floor.

We finally reached it, and are before the elevator.

"Pant, pant, pant, pant, pant, pant."

I've already lost my voice.

I can't even sigh.

I heave my shoulders, breathing.

Behind me, is an normal looking elevator like those you find in a department store, but it's locked and won't move.

Himi is trying to undo the lock with her magic.

We are protecting Himi here, relentlessly killing the sharks and migratory birds.

We already know their weak points.

We already know their movement patterns.

So it's easy to deal with them.

It's easy but ---

"..... how many on earth do we need to kill?"

I groan.

We have already been fighting here for close to 30 minutes. Shiro and Yousuke in one team, and Kiri and I in another team, taking turns to hold the line.

Right now, with Yousuke on defense, Shiro is killing off the monsters.

While trying to catch my breath, I look at them. In order to calm my beating heart. In order to rest my body. And in order to fill my brain with magic again, haah, haah, haah, I pant.

From beside me, Kiri says.

"Are you okay? Shinnosuke-kun."

"....."

"Shinnosuke-kun, your magic puts a lot of burden on your body and if you continue to use it....."

"Shut up. You should rest while you're able to. We'll switch with them in a minute."

Before my eyes, Shiro throws his spear.

"Pierce through them, Thousand Deities Flash Of Light switch!"

The drill swallows the sharks.

Killing several of them.

But, the remaining few assault Shiro. In an attempt to protect him, Yousuke raises both his hands,

"Bamboo Grove switch!"

He yells.

Several green pillars appear before his hands. The sharks crash into them, and get infected with a green, sticky poison. The poison slows them down, but can't kill them. While retreating backwards, Shiro shakes both his hands. The sharks crash into the green pillars one after another.

"Guh."

Crash into them.

"Uwu....."

Crash into them,

"Damn, Shiro!"

Shiro then bellows.

"It's all right. Duck Yousuke. Penitence Severance switch!"

His knife appears and he raises it overhead.

But, zeeh, zeeh, Shiro pants, and his chin starts bobbing.

It's no good.

He can't last any longer.

I say.

"..... fuh, haah..... all right, it's our turn. Kiri."

"Uhn."

"Once Shiro steps back, we'll switch and jump forward."

"Uhn."

"We'll stick to the same plan as before."

"I got it. Hey, Shinnosuke-kun."

"....."

"Did you realize it? The time is already....."

I look at Kiri.

Of course I realize it.

At the time we infiltrated the labyrinth, the time limit to Gunjou turning into an eternal labyrinth was 68 minutes.

And we took about 6 minutes to repel the attack of the first sharks.

We then took 10 minutes to reach the 95th floor.

And on top of that, we've been fighting here for 30 minutes.

In other words, that's a total of 46 minutes.

The remaining time displayed is just 22 minutes.

But right now, we're still on the 95th floor.

According to intel, Gunjou is on the 75th floor.

Even if the elevator were to take us directly to the 75th floor, and we were to board it right now, we would have only 15 minutes to fight Gunjou.

To face off a rank 42 labyrinth diseased girl, that's really too little time.

Even if it weren't so, it's still too tight. Compared to the number of enemies, we have too few members.

Even if we know how to kill the sharks, we'll wear out if we have to keep fighting. And as our fatigue piles up, the chance of making mistakes will increase. In a labyrinth where you will die in an instant if you make even a mistake, we can't afford to tire ourselves out.

If this were an eternal labyrinth, we could first use support magic to find a safe area, and rest there for a night if we got tired.

But this is no eternal labyrinth.

This is a time-limited labyrinth.

Thus we can't rest.

Since we are few in numbers, we also can't conserve our energy.

Right from the start until now, all of us have been going all out in listening to our magic without stop.

Kiri says.

"..... I think, it's better for us to Esc....."

But then, Himi yells from behind us.

"It's open! Everyone, please come here!"

I turn to face her. I can see the elevator door opened. I can see a single horn inside that elevator.

The horn of a shark.

"Acceleration switch!"

I use my magic. Accelerating my body, grabbing Himi's arm. And pull her back.

"Kya."

Himi gets flung back. The horn that was aiming for Himi threatens to stab into my shoulder. But it's slow. Such a slow horn won't be able to touch the accelerated me ---

"....."

That's what I thought.

But, my movements are slower than before. Slower than the time I entered the labyrinth. The tip of the horn pierces into my left shoulder. Impaling it.

"Gah, damn."

Kiri swings her sword at that horn. Stopping the force of the horn. Thanks to that, I manage to escape death.

At the same time, I stab the stomach of the shark with my sword.

The shark disappears.

"Shinnosuke-kun!"

Kiri looks at my shoulder worriedly. Blood flows out from my shoulder. It's not a fatal wound. But if the blood flows out, my stamina will further decrease.

"Hey, let me see....."

But, just as Kiri wants to touch my shoulder,

"Don't touch it. I'm fine."

I say to her.

But Kiri,

"This is no good..... is there any need....."

Her words stop there.

I know what she wanted to say. Is there any need to go this far, to the point of receiving such a wound, to save Gunjou? Is there any need to go through such danger to advance in this labyrinth?

About that.

"....."

I too don't understand. What in the world am I doing? What am I doing right now?

Looking at my own wound, I find it interesting and smirk without thinking. I myself don't even know what I am so desperately fighting for.

Why are these fellows putting their own lives in so much danger? I don't really get it.

Jeez, what the hell is this?

Is this a world full of such good guys?

Kiri looks intently at my shoulder, anxiously, sadly.

"....."

At that moment, Shiro and the rest run up to us.

"You got wounded!?"

He is worried.

Himi looks at my wound, and uses her magic.

"Band-aid switch."

While saying that, she presses on my wound. The name sounds dumb, but it's probably a curative magic. A magic that stops the bleeding. My pain rapidly subsides.

Himi says with a teary face.

"I-I'm sorry..... I let my guard down. I..... I'm always dragging you down....."

But I cut her off, glare at Himi with half-opened eyes, and say.

"Jeez, that's true."

"..... awuh."

"You really are dragging me down too much..... frankly, if you weren't here, I really don't feel like saving Gunjou."

Pohn, I give Himi's head a tap, and pull away from her. My bleeding has stopped. In that case, it's enough. I enter the elevator.

An instant later,

"..... eh."

Himi turns around in surprise, and behind her, Yousuke and Shiro have grins on their faces.

Yousuke says.

"Shinnosuke, you are kinda roundabout these days....."

"Hurry up and get in, idiot."



I say in disgust.

Then, while saying,

"The one who calls others idiot is an idiot ~"

Yousuke smiles.

Shiro also smiles happily.

Jeez, this isn't the time to be chattering idly right? Are these guys really idiots?

No, they probably are.

They probably are idiots.

And slowly, I have caught that idiocy germ, I think. Scary. Dangerous. If I continue to get myself involved with them, I might just die.

While thinking those things,

"..... my, even though we've come all the way here, we might already be too late....."

I mutter to myself.

Kiri looks at me.

Then, Shiro looks at us.

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

But, maybe because he misheard the words, 'too late', he asks Himi.

"Hey Himi. Will we be in time?"

While manipulating the elevator, Himi answers.

"From the map I saw, this elevator will reach the 76th floor in 10 minutes."

"Slow."

I say, and Himi nods apologetically.

"Sorry. But, during the time when we are riding this, we won't be attacked."

In other words, we can rest for 10 minutes.

And when we reach there, we will have 10 minutes left.

We have to clear the last floor and enter Gunjou's room and save her in 10 minutes.

But, this is probably the shortest, the safest, and the most efficient route that Himi has chosen with the Picnic switch.

If we were to continue clearing each floor as before, we would probably run out of time by the time we are done with 8 floors. Or, we would have died from getting caught in several traps.

As I thought, if Himi weren't here this time, we couldn't even proceed, and even outside of this country, it's hard to find a magician who can use such a wide range of support magic like her.

I look at Himi, then Shiro and Yousuke. They are really an amazing team, probably. If they really become my comrades --- no, given how we have entrusted our lives to one another all the way up till here, we may already be able to call ourselves comrades though --- if they would really become my comrades,

"....."

I might be able to move forward and save my little sister.....

For me to be able to think about that, that's how good they are.

And that goes the same for Kiri.

If she weren't here, I would have died many times in this labyrinth.

Normally, she will keep a safe margin and avoid making unreasonable moves while helping me out.

She knew very well that this is a labyrinth where she shouldn't have come. With her logical mind, she probably knew that she shouldn't ride on the hype and come, but yet she followed me here.

"..... u~hn."

I fold my arms.

All this while, I have never done anything as disgusting as making comrades so I don't really know what I should do now

On top of that, for 10 minutes in this elevator, nothing is going to happen as we continue to descend.

Spending 10 minutes with my comrades in this tight space.

It's quiet; nothing is happening.

It's getting terribly suffocating.

Then, Yousuke says.

"Since we have nothing to do, let's play **Shiritori**."

Are you an idiot? Go to hell. I look at Yousuke with such a thought in my mind, then sit on the floor. To rest my body.

But Yousuke smiles, and really begins a game of Shiritori with Himi and Shiro; are these guys for real? I thought.

Away from the group of fools who have lost their sanity, beside me, Kiri sits with her legs folded against her chest. She looks at me and smiles,

"..... I'm a little tired ~"

She says.

"But we are really amazing. I thought it's definitely futile, but maybe....."

"....."

"Maybe with just the five of us, we can clear a rank 42."

"....."

"We really came ~"

I smirk tiredly,

"Even though we shouldn't have."

I say.

Kiri smiles again.

"Yeah. We shouldn't have come. Well, we are idiots."

"Yeah. The worst bunch of idiots."

"Ah-haha."

Kiri smiles, and turns to look at me with a really serious face,

"Hey, Shinnosuke-kun."

She calls my name again.

I frown and reply.

"I really want to rest."

But Kiri continues.

"You know, have we really become comrades?"

"....."

"Earlier, I declared that I was a comrade of the Hero Team but..... can I become a comrade of the Hero Team, I wonder?"

She has the same confusion as I did, it seems. Well, when we got caught up with these bunch of fools who are having a game of Shiritori in such a situation, it's easy to lose our bearings, I suppose,

On top of that, she wears her 《Headphone Fuzz》 on her right ear.

She's the type who uses her left brain to manipulate her magic.

In other words, she's the type who doesn't use her emotions, but logic and rationality to control her magic. In that case, she shouldn't be able to stand this kind of situation in which she is risking her life for others with no benefit to her.

I look at Kiri with half-opened eyes, and say.

"..... since they are fools, if you were the one who caught the disease, they would come save you too, won't they?"

"Really?"

"Who knows."

"..... then, what about you, Shinnosuke-kun?"

She asks. Staring at me.

"Shinnosuke-kun, would you also..... come save me if I had manifested the disease?"

"Nah."

"Eeeh, you're terrible."

Kiri smiles.

"Even though you say that ~, but, even as you keep protesting..... you definitely would still come..... if it's you."

She tries to touch my hand.

And I am already kind of exasperated at hearing that.

That's right. She's probably right.

If Kiri had manifested the disease, I would probably go save her as well.

Even though I shouldn't be that kind of person. Even though, I have always, always, been the kind of person who would suppress the weak feelings of wanting to save someone.

Since meeting these people.

"....."

No, since seeing the Asahi Momoka who had been thanking me with a teary-eyed expression, I might have become a little weak.

Weak.

Weak.

Weak.

But then, I remember Shiro's words.

--- At any rate, it's probably an ambition you can achieve by yourself, right?

I ponder a little about those words.

Is there also really a need to be weak at times? I thought. Isn't it a weakness to be wanting comrades from one's loneliness and pain?

I really don't know. I don't know for now.

As Kiri tries to touch me, I pull my hand back and say.

"I've said this before, but I already have a date for Christmas."

"An imaginary girlfriend?"

"It's not imaginary."

"How old is she?"

"Hn?"

"What kind of hairstyle does she have?"

"Erhm."

"Right, it's all in your head."

"I want to close my eyes for a while, so can you stop talking to me?"

"Ah-haha ~"

Kiri smiles.

I close my eyes, the numbers in my head continue dropping.

17 minutes remaining.

Only 17 minutes remain before Gunjou turns into an eternal labyrinth.

The elevator descends.

Descends.

Descends.

Everyone remains silent from the fatigue.

Descends.

Descends.

Descends.

Before long, the elevator reaches the 76th floor.

I have already memorized the map of the 76th floor during our class in school. Along the way here, I have also inquired Himi about the position of this elevator.

Thus, the instant the elevator door opens, we just need to run straight to the stairs that lead down.

And at the end of those stairs, will be our diseased classmate.

Mizuiro Gunjou.

We snap our fingers all together. Activating our 《Headphone Fuzz》 .

The elevator door starts opening.

Outside the door, are sharks.

10 of them.

They haven't noticed us. Defeating them is easy. We have already been annihilating them earlier, and are used to fighting them.

But the time limit is just 10 minutes.

Thus,

"Uwooooooooh!"

We start running with all our might.



We kill sharks.

We kill sharks.

Risking our lives desperately, we fill our brains with magic enough to melt our brains.

Even though it should only take 30 seconds to run to the stairs that will connect to Gunjou's floor, killing the sharks take time, and we end up losing time steadily.

8 minutes remaining.

7 minutes remaining.

"That's all of them!"

I bellow. Swinging my Demon Sword. As I split the stomach of a shark.

At the same time, the stairs finally come into sight.

No time.

There's not much time.

We have spent too much time to reach here.

Sending a command to my 《Headphone Fuzz》 to bring up the time limit in my mind, it shows 6 minutes left.

6 minutes.

Only 6 minutes!

But finally, we can see the stairs that will lead us to Gunjou's floor.

Shiro yells.

"She's just below us! Gunjou is just below us!"

But we can't just descend carelessly. Gunjou has been taken by the labyrinth disease.

She's a rank 42 labyrinth diseased girl.

If we fight, she'll be a really strong opponent. Even if we know that her weakness is blood, based on her rank, her strength will be nothing like that of Asahi Momoka, I suppose.

We have already decided on the formation in the chopper.

On who will guard who, who will pour blood, Gunjou's weakness, on her to stop her.

And finally, I will use my Holy Sword switch to cut the illness away from Gunjou.

If we are successful, then Gunjou will turn back into a normal human being.

Provided if this magic is really complete, just as what Lizel said.

I turn around.

"Himi!"

I say.

Himi has already activated her magic.

She stops running midway, putting a distance away from us, then starts drawing the map on the floor. A magic for predicting to a certain extent the structure and trap locations in the next room.

When using that magic, Himi is defenseless, and Yousuke deploys his protective magic to protect her.

The magic completes.

Himi looks up and shouts.

"The next floor has no traps as well! She also has no guards!"

But there isn't good news.

There are two types of diseased girls.

- the type that's protected by a large number of traps and guards.
- the type that's Troublesomely strong.

The later type is more difficult. As there's a high possibility that the diseased girl's power will be at an overwhelming, lethal level.

As was largely expected, Gunjou belongs to the later type.

The type of labyrinth diseased girl who's really strong herself.

Shiro says.

"All right, then let's go. Himi should Escape here....."

But, Himi runs up to us.

"I'll go too!"

"No you can't."

But, she protests,

"I'll definitely go! There's no more time! I have already activated my Escape. If it becomes dangerous, I'll get out right away. But, I think it's better to have more of us. If by chance, Gunjou gets distracted by me, please make use of the opportunity to save her!"

She yells.

But, it doesn't matter anymore.

To have come so far, it doesn't matter anymore.

I ignore her, and breathe in.

Breathe out.

Breathe in.

Breathe out.

And then, I listen to the sound flowing from my 《Headphone Fuzz》 .

The loud blast of the cursed song, Acceleration switch, jolts my brain matter.

My brain matter shakes.

My brain pressure increases.

My brain stem trembles.

In an instant, in a flash, in the time of a flash.

In an instant, in a flash, in the time of a flash.

My magic has yet to activate.

I can't activate it yet.

I can only activate it once I reach the next floor.

Our plan has already been decided.

Since we have just a small team.

There aren't many strategies we can use.

Yousuke and Kiri will enter first.

We'll run under their protection; Yousuke will deploy AoE defensive magic while Kiri will use her absolute point defense magic.

From behind, Shiro will suppress Gunjou with specialized offensive magic, I'll observe Gunjou's movements, and jump out from the very rear.

The problem is that the Holy Sword switch will consume the entire capacity of my brain so I can't activate two magics at the same time.

In other words, until I terminate my acceleration magic, I can't use my Holy Sword switch.

I have to thrust my sword into Gunjou as if I am naked, without my acceleration, or my demon sword.

This is something that's normally impossible.

It's a fool's errand to close in on a rank 42 diseased girl naked.

But I shall do it.

The foolish, idiotic me shall do it.

Yousuke waves his fingers, muttering as he manipulates his 『Headphone Fuzz』. As if to repeatedly suggest to himself.

"..... I'll protect them. I'll protect everyone. I'll protect all my comrades."

Kiri stands behind him. And murmurs.

"Nine-fold switch ---"

A Japanese sword appears in her hand. She then turns around.

"Shinnosuke-kun, are you ready?"

Not answering.

I merely increase my concentration.

Breathing.

Breathe out.

Breathe in.

Breathe out.

Breathe in.

Then, I stop.

Only 5 minutes remain ---

The instant I stop, Shiro stands before me.

"Let's go! We'll save Gun....."

But Shiro's voice is drowned out by the noise of an explosion.

It came from below.

Dohn!

A large noise rings out.

The ground shakes.

Dohn! Dohn! Dohn!

Dohn Dohn Dohn Dohn!

The sound of fighting.

A battle has ensued below.

Yousuke yells.

"Damn, it's the guys from 『Valor Team』 !"

Himi says from behind us.

"If we don't hurry, Gunjou-san will be....."

But Shiro bellows.

"It's just nice for us! With the 『Valor Team』 distracting her, we'll save Gunjou! Let's go!"

Yousuke jumps.

Kiri jumps.

Shiro jumps.

I jump, following after Shiro.

My brain has already been engulfed with the curse.

【In an instant ♪ In a flash ♪ In the time of a flash ♪
The flash of time, the flash of an instant ♪ In an instant ♪ In a flash
——】

I descend down.

The floor below is already ridden with a sea of blood.

Covering the whole floor ---

Blood,

Blood,

Blood,

Blood,

In an instant, I thought that the entire 『Valor Team』 has been killed.

But the truth is something else.

There are no bodies lying on the floor.

Then, whose blood is it?

"....."

A girl who I know well stands in the center of the sea of blood.

It's Mizuiro Gunjou.

Like a puppet hanging from a gigantic black hand resembling that of the devil.

Her face is contorted.

Looking lonely.

Looking sad.

"..... ah..... ah..... ah..... ah....."

She groans softly.

She's trembling.

She's trembling in fear.

Before her eyes is a sea of blood.

Blood.

She's weak against blood.

On the other end, as the girl called Makoto of Kansai's 『Valor Team』 throws out an entire bucket of blood,

"All right! Just like what the data said, she's weak against blood! All right it's the end ~! Burning Bullet switch!"

While saying that, flames engulf her fist. She jumps out right to the front of Gunjou.

Gunjou extends her hands forward as she trembles. A whirlpool of water appears from her hands.

It's a defensive magic that Gunjou often uses --- Defensive Tyrant switch.

After becoming a labyrinth diseased girl, she can activate her magic instantly without invoking her 『Headphone Fuzz』 or calling out the name of the magic.

But Makoto smiles.

"Just kidding. That's a feint."

She stops.

Unexpectedly, right behind Gunjou, the girl with deep blue hair, the leader of the 『Valor Team』 closes in.

It's Mitsutomo Kujaku.

Kujaku has a knife in her hand. As she is about to thrust that knife into Gunjou's neck,

"All right Gunjou, you can take a rest. It's the end here."

She says.

If she stabs her, it'd be the end.

At that moment,

"Acceleration switch!"

I activate my magic. I kick the floor and jump.

The formation is broken right away. Gunjou is not attacking us. Instead, she's on the verge of being killed.

I'm heading to save Gunjou.

To save a diseased girl.

To save the enemy of the world from a human.

However, as if she's ready for us, Makoto look in our direction. She grins. As if they have been expecting what we would do, they have gotten into formation.

"Tempering Flames Banquet switch ~!"

She raises both hands. From her feet, a wall of flames spurts up.

It's an AOE defensive magic.

If I burst through it, my entire body will probably turn to ashes.

"Damn."

I jump to the side, and as I try to dodge the wall of flames, from behind me, Shiro yells.

"Burst through it Shinnosuke! Thousand Deities Flash Of Light switch!"

He activates his magic.

Shiro uses his spear magic.

With its drill-like tip, it zips past my side. Piercing through the wall of flames, it gouges a hole.

On the other side of the hole, 9 enemies are activating their magic, waiting for me. Probably the remaining members of the 『Valor Team』 . Both Santou Taisuke and Kamiuchi Miko are also there.

But I am not concerned about them.

Only this thought exists in my mind.

Faster.

Even for just a second.

In an instant, in a flash, in the time of a flash.

My speed surpasses even that of god.

I chase after the Thousand Deities Flash Of Light switch, slips through the enemies, and reach the side of Gunjou and Kujaku.

I don't care about my back.

Even though there are 8 enemies behind me, I never turned around.

My comrades should be covering my back.

Shiro, Yousuke, Kiri and Himi should be protecting me.

It sounds really foolish. Really stupid. But I trust my comrades and look forward.

I look only at Gunjou.

I look only at the figure of my classmate, my comrade.

Gunjou notices me. She stares at me with her vacant, almond-shaped, beautiful eyes.

Then instantly,

"..... ah."

She says.

Her eyes suddenly widen.

She focuses on me.

Completely different from the reaction of Asahi Momoka.

Looking at me, her eyes quivered. She's clearly wavering. Is she conscious? But it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter now. I'll save her. Because I'll save her.

I extend my hand. I grab the hand of Kujaku that's about to kill Gunjou. At that moment, my acceleration magic ends.

Kujaku looks at me.

"..... oh my, are you interfering with us from saving the world?"

Kujaku throws away her knife readily.

She retreats a step back.

She intends to use magic against me.

But I can't deal with that. As I have already let the cursed song of Holy Sword flow from my 《Headphone Fuzz》 .

And I can't use another magic together with Holy Sword switch.

I'm completely defenseless.

I'm completely a dunce.

But it's fine.

If I can save Gunjou.

If I'm not killing a labyrinth diseased girl, not giving up on her,

"....."

If I can save her, I don't mind being a trashy blockhead.

I can hear Shiro's bellowing voice.

"Do it! Shinnosuke! Save Gunjou!"

Of course.

I've come here for that purpose.

I will definitely succeed.

The magic in my brain completes.

Jolting my brain matter,

【Deceiving the night ♪

Beguiling the world ♪

The darkness that saves the girl of the endless night ♪】

"Holy Sword switch ---"

I say.



A silver sword appears in my right hand. Shrouded by light, a shining sword. A sword of hypocrisy that resembles a sword that a hero carries.

A sword that might be able to sever the disease away from a diseased girl.

Kujaku looks at me and smiles. She waves her fingers, manipulating her
《Headphone Fuzz》 ---

"....."

But she didn't.

She is not using her magic. After looking hard at the sword I conjured, she then turns her eyes to what's behind me. That shift in her gaze is so natural that I almost believe it without thinking. That someone is attacking me from behind. That's the effect that it has on me.

But I don't turn around. Since there's nothing I can do even if I turn around.

As long as I'm holding this papier-mâché Holy Sword that can be used to save labyrinth diseased girls, I can't do anything else.

So I don't turn around.

I trust that my back is protected by my comrades, and don't turn around.

I then brandish my sword.

I brandish my sword at Gunjou.

Gunjou does not dodge it. As if she's preparing to die, as if she's leaving herself to me, she stares at me, not moving.

"..... I'll save you now, Gunjou!"

Just as I am about to raise my Holy Sword overhead, at that moment.

"Hurry up and do it, Kiri."

Kujaku says.

Another lie. A lie to confuse me. Thus, without concerning myself with it, I raise my sword ---

"....."

But, tohn, a sound comes from my own chest.

Initially, I don't know what happen. Because my body has been cleanly, skillfully pierced.

Something pierces me from behind, goes through my body and exits from my chest.

What came flying out from my chest is a sword.

A Japanese sword.

The Japanese sword that Kiri uses.

That's what has impaled me. I cant move. Maybe I have been affected by some kind of magic.

From behind me, a voice sounds.

The voice of a comrade.

The voice of Kiryuu Kiri.

"..... see, I told you right? This labyrinth isn't something you should be entering..... you have Escaped....."

"....."

"That's what you get for trying to save a comrade. The world is this dark."

Beside me, Gunjou looks at my chest immediately.

She looks at my chest from which blood is pouring out.

I can tell that she's wavering.

She's trembling.

She's quivering, trembling.

Then,

"Ah, ah, ah,aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!?"



She hollers.

She tries to extend her hand to what's behind me, but, several students of the 『Valor Team』 uses a number of magics and force Gunjou down to the floor.

Pressed against the floor covered in a sea of blood, Gunjou is once again unable to move.

Because her weakness is blood.

Because she's afraid of blood.

And the 『Valor Team』 is maximizing the use of that.

Kujaku slowly stands before Gunjou. She takes a pocket watch from her pocket and says.

"There are just 2 minutes remaining. It's almost time, I guess."

I look at the time displayed in my head.

The time limit remaining is 2 minutes and 12 seconds.

2 minutes and 12 seconds remain.

Kujaku has plenty of time to kill Gunjou.

I say.

"..... Kiri..... pull out your sword."

"....."

"Kiri."

"....."

"Kiri!?"

I turn around. Kiri is smiling. She's smirking with her sword inside me.

"Sorry, Shinnosuke-kun."

Behind Kiri, Shiro, Himi, and Yousuke have all fallen.

It seems like everyone has a sword pierced through them, pinning them to the floor. Probably Kiri's magic. Kiri's swords. No one would have thought

that Kiri would turn traitorous and in an unsightly manner, they were readily rendered helpless ---

I glare at Kiri and say.

"..... Kiri..... pull out sword."

"No way."

"No, you'd pull out your sword. I believe in you....."

"Ah-haha. You can't do that. You can't trust someone like me."

"No way. I trust you."

"You can't."

"I trust you."

"I said you can't."

"Shut up! Didn't you talk about being comrades earlier! Therefore, you are our comrade!"

I bellow.

On hearing that, Kiri's smiling face..... suddenly contorts. She contorts in pain, in suffering; and even as she tries to hold them back, in the end, tears flow from her eyes.

"..... I, I really..... I thought I saw a dream in which I could really become your comrade....."

"Kiri! Forget that and just pull out the sword!"

"I can't. I..... I....."

"I don't know what kind of a hold they have for you but, but I, we'll protect you so please, pull out your sword!"

I yell.

But, even as her tears continue to flow, Kiri does not pull out her sword.

"..... I'm sorry, Shinnosuke-kun."

"Don't screw with me!"

"Sorry..... sorry."

Kiri says in a trembling voice.

There's no more time.

There's already no more time.

15 seconds remain.

But in the end.

In the end, the world is terribly dark.

There is no miracle.

There is no god.

You are finished if you are weak; I have forgotten that.

Kujaku says.

"Then, I'll use this knife to....."

"Stop!"

I turn around.

"Stop please! I..... I have a magic that can save Gunjou....."

But it's too late.

Kujaku thrusts the knife into Gunjou's chest.

"Ka-hah."

Gunjou coughs out blood.

But she does not die.

She won't die with just this.

And then, the time limit is reached.

What's displayed in my 《Headphone Fuzz》 is 0 ---

"....."

Mizuiro Gunjou starts turning into an eternal labyrinth right before our very eyes.

Afterword

All right, this is the second volume!

I must first announce what must be announced.

Apocalypse Alice!

Fast as it is, it's getting a comic serialization!

Its serialization will start in the April issue of Mediafactory's 「Gekkan Comic Gene」 which will be sold on 15 March 2014!

Everyone, please support iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiitttt!

An amazing person called Youko-san who got the MF Comic grand award will be the artist for the manga!

Do give us your feedback through the survey!!

And that's the announcement.

How do you find this volume?

Well, I myself also find that things have become quite incredible in just the second volume.

Right from the beginning, I have wanted it to be something like this in the second volume, but still, as I wrote it, I found it really quite outrageous as well.

Those who have finished reading it. How was it?

Erm, since I'm going into spoilers, those who haven't read it yet, go away go away!

But then, for those who read it.

Looking at the cover page and the first illustration, can you see the twist???

In 『Apocalypse Alice』, I have prepared plenty of hidden twists where characters who have been developed get toppled over but will come back with a bang, and even things that have been established in a single volume is just a preface; actually, among all my works, this really has the most crazy developments so everyone, please look forward to them!

And in this volume, Shiro is peerless right!

Thanks to Shiro, Shinnosuke's no-life situation becomes boisterous, and I wrote that with a self-satisfied smirk. Now now, you have seen the backbones of all the characters, so what will the 「Hero Team」 do from now on!

And for this, please look forward to finding out in volume 3!

And also, the 4th volume of 『Seraph of the End』, the manga in which I'm in charge of the manuscript and published in Jump SQ, is released!

It has an ad for 『Apocalypse Alice』, you know!

In exchange for advertising 『Seraph of the End』 in my 『The Legend of the Legendary Heroes』, they are also advertising for 『Apocalypse Alice』!

If possible, please take a look at it. The ad is a pretty big one,

『We will kill the girls to save the world ---』

Is written on it!!! (LOL)

And with this and that, we've come to the end of this volume.

And thus, everyone, let's meet again in the next volume!

For those who are reading 『Denyuuden』, let's meet in 『Denyuuden』!

For those who are reading 『Seraph of the End』, let's meet in 『Seraph of the End』.

Let's meet again!

Thank you for your support!

Kagami Takaya

References

1. ↑ Headphone Fuzz: Always written as Intra-Cerebral Magic Activator (脳内魔導起機), and read as Headphone Fuzz (ヘッドフォンファズ). Subsequently in the rest of the volume, I will only use the reading in the translations.

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